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# America in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era

Course Guidebook

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College of the Holy Cross



**PUBLISHED BY:**

**THE GREAT COURSES**

**Corporate Headquarters**

**4840 Westfields Boulevard, Suite 500**

**Chantilly, Virginia 20151-2299**

**Phone: 1-800-832-2412**

**Fax: 703-378-3819**

**[www.thegreatcourses.com](http://www.thegreatcourses.com)**

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Professor O'Donnell is the author or coauthor of several books, including *Henry George and the Crisis of Inequality: Progress and Poverty in the Gilded Age*, *Visions of America: A History of the United States*, *Ship Ablaze: The Tragedy of the Steamboat General Slocum*, and *1001 Things Everyone Should Know about Irish American History*. He also writes a blog on American history at [www.InThePastLane.com](http://www.InThePastLane.com) and can be found on Twitter at @InThePastLane.

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From 2002 to 2014, Professor O'Donnell worked in the U.S. Department of Education's Teaching American History program. He led workshops and seminars and delivered multimedia lectures on American history topics designed to help teachers devise innovative methods for using primary sources, especially visual documents, in their classrooms.

A popular public speaker, Professor O'Donnell has delivered hundreds of invited talks and conducted more than 2,000 walking tours through New York City's ethnic neighborhoods, such as Chinatown, Little Italy, and

Harlem. In his spare time, he is an avid bread baker, dedicated runner, and aspiring guitar player.

For The Great Courses, Professor O'Donnell also has taught *Turning Points in American History*. ■

# Table of Contents

---

## INTRODUCTION

Professor Biography .....	i
Course Scope .....	1

## LECTURE GUIDES

### LECTURE 1

1865: "Bind Up the Nation's Wounds" .....	4
---	---

### LECTURE 2

The Reconstruction Revolution .....	11
-------------------------------------	----

### LECTURE 3

Buffalo Bill Cody and the Myth of the West .....	18
--	----

### LECTURE 4

Smokestack Nation: The Industrial Titans .....	26
--	----

### LECTURE 5

Andrew Carnegie: The Self-Made Ideal .....	34
--	----

### LECTURE 6

Big Business: Democracy for Sale? .....	41
---	----

### LECTURE 7

The New Immigrants: A New America .....	49
---	----

### LECTURE 8

Big Cities: The Underbelly Revealed .....	57
---	----

### LECTURE 9

Popular Culture: Jazz, Modern Art, Movies .....	65
---	----

### LECTURE 10

New Technology: Cars, Electricity, Records .....	73
--	----

## Table of Contents

---

### LECTURE 11

The 1892 Homestead Strike .....	80
---------------------------------	----

### LECTURE 12

Morals and Manners: Middle-Class Society .....	88
--	----

### LECTURE 13

Mrs. Vanderbilt's Gala Ball .....	95
-----------------------------------	----

### LECTURE 14

Populist Revolt: The Grangers and Coxey .....	102
---	-----

### LECTURE 15

Rough Riders and the Imperial Dream .....	109
---	-----

### LECTURE 16

No More Corsets: The New Woman .....	116
--------------------------------------	-----

### LECTURE 17

Trust-Busting in the Progressive Era .....	124
--	-----

### LECTURE 18

The 1911 Triangle Fire and Reform .....	131
---	-----

### LECTURE 19

Theodore Roosevelt, Conservationist .....	138
---	-----

### LECTURE 20

Urban Reform: How the Other Half Lives .....	146
--	-----

### LECTURE 21

The 17 <sup>th</sup> Amendment: Democracy Restored .....	154
--	-----

### LECTURE 22

Early Civil Rights: Washington or Du Bois? .....	161
--	-----

### LECTURE 23

Over There: A World Safe for Democracy .....	168
--	-----

## Table of Contents

---

### **LECTURE 24**

Upheaval and the End of an Era .....	176
--------------------------------------	-----

### **SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL**

Reading List.....	184
-------------------	-----





# America in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era

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## Scope:

This course examines the half century defined as the Gilded Age (1865–1900) and the Progressive Era (1900–1920), one of the most important periods in American history. The Gilded Age, as the name suggests, was in many ways a golden time. This exciting period saw spectacular advances in industrial output and technological innovation that transformed the United States from a predominantly agricultural nation—ranking well behind England, Germany, and France in 1865—to the world’s most formidable industrial power by 1900. Accompanying this transformation was the emergence of industrial titans, such men as Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, and J. P. Morgan. Many Americans celebrated them as “self-made men” and “captains of industry” whose genius was guiding the United States to greatness. They also celebrated a series of astonishing achievements, from the completion of the transcontinental railroad (1869) and the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge (1883), to the laying of the Atlantic cable connecting London and New York by telegraph (1866), to the unveiling of the Statue of Liberty (1886). At these celebrations, American orators invoked the optimistic themes of progress, expansion, growth, and success. Our course will explore these and many more trends and events, including the efforts to win the West by subduing the last of the resisting tribes of Native Americans, the transformation of the United States from a nation committed to isolationism to one intent on becoming a force in foreign affairs, and the emergence of an American middle class.

In many ways, the Gilded Age marked the emergence of modern America. But this transformation in the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was neither smooth nor peaceful. Thus, this course also addresses the less upbeat aspects of the Gilded Age. Indeed, the name Gilded Age carried a second meaning that suggested a disturbing superficiality to the progress of the era. A gilded piece of jewelry, after all, only looks like solid gold. Beneath the thin gold layer is cold, hard, black steel. In keeping with this useful metaphor, our course will examine what many Americans in the Gilded Age saw when they peered beneath the shine of progress. We will explore the darker consequences

of industrialization and laissez-faire government, especially the immense power accrued by big businesses and capitalists—people dubbed “robber barons” by their critics. Closely related to this trend was the emergence of a new class of super-rich Americans who went to great lengths to exhibit their wealth and mimic the behavior of European aristocrats—a development that some deemed outrageous and others found alluring. We will also take a close look at the struggles of American workers, the frequent episodes of labor-capital violence (the period 1880–1900 witnessed nearly 37,000 strikes), and workers’ efforts to build a labor movement. Because this era was also marked by mass immigration and rapid urbanization, we will take a close look at the challenges both trends posed and the conflicting ways in which Americans responded to them.

By 1900, the fear and anxiety produced by these Gilded Age challenges led to growing popular support for economic, social, and political reforms. This Progressive Era marked a profound shift in American political culture and social values. Our course will examine how reformers came to reject the ideals of laissez-faire and small government that had dominated since the days of the Founding Fathers. Such values, argued Progressives, made sense in the small, agrarian republic of the early 1800s. But in the age of big business, such a policy threatened to destroy American democracy and republican institutions. What was needed, they claimed, was a strong and active government that operated in the name of the common good. We will examine how these notions led such reformers as Theodore Roosevelt to push for laws that restrained big business and protected American workers and consumers—often spurred on by muckraking journalists, including Ida Tarbell and Upton Sinclair. We will also explore parallel reform efforts to restore and strengthen American democracy by reducing corruption and increasing the voice of the average citizen in politics. Our course will likewise take a close look at the emergence of the conservation movement, a forerunner to the modern environmental movement. And we will take time to explore the impact of new technologies, including electricity, the automobile, and the phonograph, as well as new forms of music, literature, and art.

These two periods of American history are fascinating in their own right, but they also offer many insights into some of the major questions that

dominate political debates in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. These questions concern, for example, the influence of corporate money in politics, the proper size and role of government, the desirability of mass immigration, the rights of workers to form unions, and the appropriate extent of diplomatic and military engagement with the wider world. ■

# 1865: “Bind Up the Nation’s Wounds”

## Lecture 1

The first half of this course addresses the forces in the United States during the 1870s to 1890s that produced the Gilded Age. It encompasses the bootstraps-to-ballroom experience of such men as Carnegie, Mellon, and Rockefeller in an era of rapid industrialization. The second half of the course considers the agenda of such reformers as Theodore Roosevelt, Susan B. Anthony, and Williams Jennings Bryan from 1900 to 1920, the period known as the Progressive Era. In this first lecture, we’ll look at the situation in the United States in 1865, examine the challenges confronting America during its postwar years, and consider key issues and broad themes that lie at the heart of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era.

### The Postwar Years in America

- Clearly, the most significant event in the year 1865 was the conclusion of the Civil War. The young American Republic had survived the ultimate test, and at least in the North, there was much cause for celebration. Yet no American could ignore the astonishing damage done to the nation over the course of the war.
- The war claimed somewhere between 620,000 and 750,000 lives. Beyond the human cost, there was also economic devastation. Many major southern cities, including Atlanta, Charleston, Columbia, and Richmond, lay in ashes, and millions of southerners, both white and black, faced homelessness, sickness, and starvation. Reconstructing the South—and, by extension, the Union itself—was emerging as one of the great challenges faced by the nation.
- Like so many wars, the Civil War also unleashed extraordinary and unanticipated social, political, and economic changes.
  - First, the abolition of slavery ended an institution that had been central to American life for nearly 250 years. Quite suddenly, some 4 million people who had previously been considered property were now free.

- Second, the war necessitated a vast increase in the size and reach of the federal government. In 1860, the federal budget was \$78 million. Five years later, it had grown to \$1.3 billion. In 1867, when war expenditures were greatly diminished, the budget still tallied \$377 million. It would not dip below \$300 million ever again.
- Finally, the demands of the Union military triggered a boom in industrialization that roared well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, albeit with a few economic depressions. Industrialization, in turn, led to rapid urbanization and the rise of great cities. By 1900, the United States would stand as the supreme industrial power in the world.

### Issues Facing the American Republic

- The postwar years in America witnessed a massive population boom. In 1860, the American population was a little more than 31 million. By 1900, it topped 76 million—an increase of 142 percent. Immigration, which played a key role in America's population boom, was likewise beginning to surge, but it triggered a nativist backlash that demonized immigrants as a threat to American society.



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**One of the first laws passed by Congress to restrict immigration led to the opening of the immigrant screening facility at Ellis Island in 1892.**

- In 1865, industrial output was also booming. The value of industrial output from 1860 to 1900 soared from \$2 billion to \$13 billion. Industrialization did more than merely provide jobs. The

stupendous number and variety of goods produced in the nation's factories transformed America into a consumer society.

- At the same time, the United States was rapidly urbanizing. In 1860, only 20 percent of Americans lived in the nation's 392 cities. By 1890, 35 percent would live in more than 1,300 cities. Americans who visited these cities were shocked, not simply by their size but also by their high rates of poverty, crime, disease, and violence.
- Foreign relations in 1865 were still dominated by tensions with the world's one superpower, Great Britain. Anti-British sentiment had soared in the North during the war over British attempts to aid the Confederacy, and this anger would persist for years to come.
- In addition, Great Britain and the other major European powers, such as France, Germany, and Belgium, were beginning to seize much of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East as colonies.
  - Toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, increasing numbers of political, business, and military leaders began to call for the United States to build up its navy and take a more assertive role in foreign affairs.
  - This interventionist sentiment led the United States to declare war on Spain in 1898, a conflict that would result in the acquisition of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines as colonial holdings.
- Out in the trans-Mississippi West, several major wars between tribes and state militia or federal troops had begun in 1864, before the Civil War ended. These were but a foretaste of the many Indian wars that would ensue in the coming decades, ending with the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890. The primary cause of this conflict was a massive postwar migration of white Americans into the West.
- In the American South in 1865, two major initiatives were underway. The first was the effort to rebuild the war-torn region.

The second involved the question of what was to be done with the 4 million recently freed slaves. Would they enjoy the rights of full citizens of the republic, or would they be recognized as semi-citizens, with only some basic rights?

- Socially and far more subtly, in 1865, great changes were underway in the nature of family life and gender roles. Increasingly, middle-class American women went to college, married later, and had fewer children. Many also became active in civic and reform movements, including the movement for women to gain the right to vote.

### Defining Terms

- The term *Gilded Age* comes from the title of a book coauthored by Mark Twain, *The Gilded Age: A Tale of To-Day*, which depicted an America rife with corruption, greed, and exploitation. For later historians, the term *Gilded Age* perfectly captured the dualities of the time.
  - As the phrase suggests, the era was, on the one hand, characterized by astonishing advances in industrial production and technological innovation.
  - On the other hand, it was an age marked by intense labor-capital conflict and racial violence, as well as a disturbing rise in wealth inequality.
- The Gilded Age saw the United States transformed from a mainly agricultural nation to the world's greatest industrial power by 1900. Along the way, Americans celebrated many remarkable achievements, including the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, the Atlantic cable connecting London and New York by telegraph in 1866, and others.
- But when some looked beneath the gilded surface of American life, what they found were the darker consequences of industrialization: the immense power accrued by big business, the growing numbers of workers living in slums, and the frequent episodes of labor-capital violence. It wasn't until after 1900, however, that a pro-

reform consensus emerged that led to changes in U.S. economic, political, and social policy. This period, between 1900 and 1920, is known as the *Progressive Era*.

- The Progressive Era was a wide-ranging effort to address the serious problems that threatened American life during the Gilded Age. Progressives enacted policies designed to rein in the power of big business, alleviate poverty, improve public health, make the democratic process more honest and fair, provide greater opportunity for average citizens to improve their lives, and preserve the environment.

### **Themes and Issues of Our Course**

- One theme that we'll explore repeatedly in this course is that of extremes. The Gilded Age was marked by the rise of a small group of the super rich and a large class of urban poor.
- A second theme is contradictions. For example, Americans in the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era expanded the vote to include women at the same time that they took it away from most African Americans.
- A third theme involves competing ideals. Americans in this period revered republican ideals, such as freedom, equality, and justice, but they fought over their meanings and over which values were the most important.
- A fourth theme concerns the debate over the proper role of the state. Many Americans argued that republican liberty depended on minimal government, as Thomas Jefferson had advocated. But increasing numbers of Americans contended that republican liberty in the age of industry and ever-advancing technology required the government to play a greater role in mediating between contending interests in society and in promoting the common good.



## **Underlying Concepts in the Study of History**

- It's rare that something occurs in history as the result of a single factor, decision, or trend. President Theodore Roosevelt, for example, took on the corporate trusts during his administration for many reasons, not one.
- In studying history, we must keep in mind that people living in any given period are never prepared for what's coming, be it an invasion, an earthquake, or a transformative invention. History, in other words, is the study of surprises.
- We should also note that in many ways, history is the study of conflict—both wars and conflicting ideas. For example, many of the original colonists argued that it was essential to remain loyal to England, while others concluded that they needed to break away to form an independent nation.
- We all know that history is often shaped by towering figures, such as Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Carnegie. But good historians emphasize that history is also made by many nameless and faceless people—slaves, factory workers, farmers, suffragists, and others—who exert agency. That is, they take matters into their own hands and drive historical change.
- Moments of great historical change often arrive in the midst of crisis. History is full of examples in which a great crisis led to a dramatic break with tradition—moments when the unthinkable became possible. For example, the Great Depression led to the New Deal, a set of programs that never would have been passed by Congress in the 1920s or earlier.
- If history is the study of surprises, it most surely is also the study of choices. Nothing is inevitable. At any given moment in history, change is driven by choices made by people. We'll see this concept repeatedly in the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era, from the decision of Congress to force Native American tribes

onto reservations to the decision of President Wilson to call for a declaration of war against Germany in 1917.

- Many people study history because it's interesting—full of compelling characters and dramatic events. But it's also important to find some deeper meaning and significance in history—its relevance in our lives. As the historian Matthew Frye Jacobson said, "History is what we are made of." In other words, the society in which we live has been shaped and is being shaped by our history. Thus, learning about history helps us better understand the world in which we live.

### Suggested Reading

Beatty, *Age of Betrayal*.

Edwards, *New Spirits*.

Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*.

Twain and Warner, *The Gilded Age*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What challenges did the United States face in 1865?
2. What new, transformative trends were emerging in 1865?
3. What does it mean to say that history is the study of choices and surprises?

# The Reconstruction Revolution

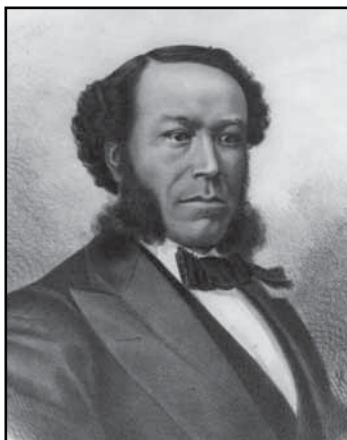
## Lecture 2

In the decades leading to the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, two questions dominated American political discourse: (1) What would be the fate of slavery in the American Republic? (2) Did states possess the right to secede from the Union? The Civil War provided unequivocal answers to these questions by abolishing slavery and crushing secession. But the aftermath of the war also introduced new questions: (1) What would be the status of the former Confederate states, and how would they be reintegrated into the Union? (2) What would be the status of the former slaves? We'll explore the competing answers to these questions in this lecture.

### Reconstructing the South

- Among the questions that dominated the Reconstruction era (c. 1865–1877) were these: What would be the status of the former Confederate states, and what would be the status of former slaves? Various groups of Americans provided different answers.
- Moderates, including Abraham Lincoln, believed that the wisest policy was to readmit the former Confederate states quickly and on fairly lenient terms. On the issue of the status of former slaves, moderates said very little, hoping to avoid controversies that might impede Reconstruction. They envisioned a slow and deliberate effort to discover the proper place of African Americans in society.
- Offsetting the moderates were the radical Republicans, led by such men as Representative Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania and Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts. This group believed that Reconstruction must proceed slowly to ensure that all vestiges of slavery and the society built on it were eradicated. They argued that the 4 million former slaves should immediately be granted full citizenship and that the federal government was obliged to protect the rights of former slaves against those who remained opposed to racial equality.

- A third group was made up of conservatives, including some northerners and nearly all white southerners. Like the moderates, they argued that former Confederate states should be rapidly reintegrated into the Union. However, they also argued that the emancipated slaves should be granted “nothing but freedom”; that is, they should not be considered full citizens.



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- A fourth group, of course, were the 4 million former slaves. Some of their leaders, such as Frederick Douglass, participated in the debate over the postwar rights of emancipated African Americans and the status of southern statehood during Reconstruction. But the vast majority of those African Americans didn't wait for politicians to decide how much freedom they were entitled to. Instead, as soon as the Civil War ended, they immediately claimed and made the most of their liberty, often by acquiring land and education.

**After passage of the First Reconstruction Act and ratification of the 14th Amendment, Joseph Rainey became the first African American to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives.**

## Reconstruction Revolution

- The period from roughly 1865 to 1872 might be called the Reconstruction Revolution because it witnessed a series of extraordinary developments. Initially, however, this revolution almost didn't happen.
- When Lincoln was assassinated in April 1865, he was succeeded by his vice president, Andrew Johnson. A poor yeoman farmer from east Tennessee, Johnson had risen to political prominence in the

1850s as a populist critic of the planter class. When secession came, Johnson was the only southern senator who did not resign from Congress. In 1864, Lincoln chose him as his running mate because Johnson seemed to symbolize southerners who had remained loyal to the Union.

- In the immediate aftermath of the war, Johnson indicated that he would take a hard line against the former Confederacy, a position that pleased radical Republicans. But he soon announced a remarkably lenient Reconstruction program intended to be completed quickly.
  - To qualify for reinstatement in the Union, former Confederate states needed only to repudiate secession, including debts incurred as a result of it, and ratify the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, abolishing slavery.
  - With limited exceptions, southerners who took an oath of loyalty to the Union would have all their political rights and property restored.
  - Because Congress was not in session that summer, Johnson had a free hand to carry out this plan, and by December 1865, with all ex-Confederate states readmitted except for Texas, he declared Reconstruction over.
- Why did President Johnson, who had made a name for himself as an enemy of the planter class, now become the greatest ally of the planters? The answer, in simplest terms, is that Johnson despised the notion of black equality. In his mind, the only way to maintain white supremacy in the South was to reestablish the region's former leaders. Conservatives were pleased with Johnson's program. In contrast, many Republicans, including moderates, were furious. And their anger grew more intense as they observed developments in the South.
  - Many state constitutional conventions failed to accept the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

- Southern voters elected many ex-Confederate officials and army officers to state and national offices.
- Southern states passed laws that came to be known as *Black Codes*, which sharply limited freedmen's civil and economic rights.
- Riots broke out across the South, leading to the deaths of hundreds of African Americans.
- Many angry northerners wondered if the recently concluded Civil War had been fought in vain. To prevent the northern victory from being rolled back in the war's aftermath, Republicans in Congress took a series of bold steps.
  - First, they refused to admit the newly elected representatives of ex-Confederate states that Johnson had deemed "reconstructed." Next, they gathered evidence and testimony from hundreds of witnesses about the violence and oppression experienced by freedmen and their white allies in the South. Then, they passed two pieces of key legislation.
  - One reauthorized the Freedmen's Bureau (a relief agency for the war-torn South) and expanded its powers. The other was the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which declared anyone born in the United States—including African Americans—to be a citizen. It also prohibited states from passing such laws as the Black Codes.
  - Johnson was enraged by Congress's attempt to thwart his Reconstruction program. He vetoed the expanded Freedmen's Bureau Bill and the Civil Rights Act, but Congress quickly overrode both vetoes, and the bills became law.
- By the summer of 1866, Republicans in Congress decided that even bolder action was necessary. On June 13 of that year, the Republican-controlled Congress passed the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which radically redefined the role of the federal government as a guarantor

of individual civil rights. It declared all persons born or naturalized in the United States to be citizens, and it declared that all citizens were entitled to “equal protection of the laws.” No state could pass laws that limited the freedoms and rights of any particular group.

- In response, Johnson campaigned around the country against ratification of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. This infuriated congressional Republicans, who moved to take complete control of postwar Reconstruction efforts.
  - In March 1867, they passed the First Reconstruction Act, which divided the South into five military districts, each of which was to be ruled by an appointed governor. The new law also established much tougher requirements for southern states to meet before being readmitted to the Union, including ratification of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Amendments.
  - The First Reconstruction Act also established voting rights for African Americans and disenfranchised former Confederate political leaders and army officers.
- The result of this legislation was the Reconstruction Revolution: 700,000 African Americans registered to vote, as did 627,000 whites. Together, they formed an interracial coalition that became the foundation of the postwar Republican Party in the South. Soon, state conventions rewrote state constitutions to meet the more demanding reunification criteria. By the end of 1868, seven former Confederate states had been readmitted to the Union—and the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment had been ratified.
- In the midst of all this activity, Congress passed the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, prohibiting the denial of the vote on the basis of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” Ratified in 1870, it was followed by the first of several Force Acts, by which Congress authorized the federal government to maintain order in areas where vigilante groups terrorized African Americans and their supporters.

## Reconstruction Counterrevolution

- After 1872, however, many accomplishments of the Reconstruction Revolution were dismantled in a process we might refer to as the Reconstruction Counterrevolution. The federal government's commitment to upholding democracy in the South began to waver and, eventually, disappeared. This allowed southerners who had remained committed to white supremacy to reacquire power, often by violent and illegal means.
- Historians cite four primary reasons for this counterrevolution. First, the administration of Ulysses Grant became embroiled in a series of scandals after initially doing a great deal to uphold civil rights and democracy in the South. Grant was forced to devote much of his attention to damage control, leaving little energy or political capital for maintaining a vigorous Reconstruction effort.
- A second reason for Reconstruction's demise was the crash of the economy in what is known as the Panic of 1873. This was the 19<sup>th</sup>-century equivalent of the Great Depression. It lasted for five years, producing 25 percent unemployment and the collapse of thousands of banks, businesses, and farms. In the face of this suffering, northern legislators found it hard to justify spending money and time to protect civil rights in the South.
- Third, the commitment to Reconstruction was weakened by a chorus of critics who said that the federal government had done enough. It was time for freedmen to take advantage of their new rights and liberties to make a go of it in American society.
- A final factor contributing to the federal government's withdrawal of its commitment to freedom and democracy in the South was a successful propaganda campaign waged by southerners. In the mid-1870s, southern politicians and writers began to speak about the alleged horrors inflicted on the southern white population as the result of "Negro misrule." Playing on northern racism, they argued that giving freedom and the vote to former slaves was a colossal failure that led to chaos, corruption, and lawlessness.



- Sensing the diminished commitment of the federal government, the Democratic Party and paramilitary groups associated with it, such as the Ku Klux Klan, became more active in the mid-1870s. By 1876, all former Confederate states had been returned to Democratic majorities that were committed to reestablishing white supremacy and undoing the achievements of Reconstruction. That same year, the last vestiges of federal troops were removed from the South. Reconstruction, for all intents and purposes, was over.
- The end of Reconstruction was followed by several decades in which the South put in place a system of racial segregation and exploitation known as *Jim Crow*. By 1900, most African Americans in the South lived as poor sharecroppers, and more than 60 percent had lost the right to vote through such tactics as the poll tax. But even in those dark days, African Americans continued the struggle for civil rights that had begun during Reconstruction, knowing that they had the Constitution on their side.

### Suggested Reading

Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name*.

Foner, *Reconstruction*.

Richardson, *West from Appomattox*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What major social and political questions dominated Reconstruction?
2. What were the major accomplishments of the early years of Reconstruction?
3. Why is the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment so significant, both in Reconstruction and ever since?

# Buffalo Bill Cody and the Myth of the West

## Lecture 3

In this lecture, we will examine the conquest of the West, one of the most misunderstood periods in American history. We will begin by challenging some of the key myths surrounding the American West. We will then discuss the great westward migration, detailing the motivations of millions of Americans to move west and their transformation of the region. Next, we will turn our attention to the central problem of westward expansion: the fact that hundreds of thousands of Native Americans already lived in the West and considered the land theirs. Finally, we will examine the “rest of the story,” that is, how this era in American history is remembered.

### Myths of the American West

- There is probably no period in American history that has been mythologized more than the story of the settlement and development of the West. One of the key myths about this period is that the West is a separate place.
  - When most Americans think of pioneers heading west, they envision them crossing a boundary line—perhaps the Mississippi River—whereupon they left behind the United States and entered the West. According to this thinking, the West was unconnected to the great civilization emerging in the East.
  - But we don’t have to look very hard to see how erroneous this view is. A national telegraph and railroad network tied the West to the East. The great majority of economic activity in the West was also tied to markets in the East.
- A second myth about the West is that it was a place of rugged individualism with almost no government. This myth is shattered by several key factors that facilitated westward migration and settlement.

- In 1862, Congress passed two laws that had great bearing on the West. The Pacific Railway Act authorized and funded the building of the transcontinental railroad to open the West to settlement. In addition, the Homestead Act divided millions of acres of western land into 160-acre plots that settlers could acquire for free or for a small fee.
- Further, the U.S. government stepped in to provide tens of thousands of soldiers to defeat the Native Americans and remove them to reservations.
- A third myth holds that the West was settled primarily by white Americans. But in fact, an incredibly diverse array of people participated in the great migration to the West.
- Yet another myth holds that westward settlement unfolded like a carpet of civilization, moving from the East to the West and ending at the Pacific Ocean. In this vision, the frontier was a clear line that retreated as settlement pushed further west. But once the Gold Rush began in 1849, the West Coast was rapidly settled, while the Great Plains and other interior spaces were settled later.
- According to another myth, the West was a simple place where men and women used their bare hands, a few tools, and maybe a horse and an ox to establish new lives. In other words, it was cut off from the emerging modern world of cities, electricity, and industrial machinery. However, pioneers brought with them as much of the modern world as they could, including factory-made tools and clothing and even canned food. Further, when they established farms, most settlers envisioned growing crops to sell on the market. To do so, they purchased an essential piece of high-tech machinery: the mechanical reaper.
- A final myth about the West is that conflict between Native Americans and white settlers was inevitable. However, when early white explorers established contact with Native American tribes, both groups tended to get along well. These relationships fell apart



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For most Americans who participated in the great migration, the West loomed as a land brimming with economic opportunity, particularly the chance to own land.

only after the white population began to surge and whites demanded more of Native Americans' traditional lands.

### The Western Economy

- One of the cornerstones of the western economy was farming. Because the late 19<sup>th</sup> century is heavily associated with rapid industrialization and urbanization, many people believe that agriculture in America necessarily declined, but that's not the case in this period.
  - Between 1860 and 1900, the number of farms in the United States nearly tripled, growing from 2 million to 5.7 million. And the value produced by these farms more than doubled, from \$6.6 billion to \$16.6 billion.
  - If we consider what modern industrialization involves, these numbers should come as no surprise. The millions of people who moved to industrial centers to work in factories and

other nonagricultural pursuits got their food from the growing number of farms in the West.

- Of course, life for western farmers wasn't easy. They faced innumerable challenges posed by the elements and by the unstable commodities market, with prices for crops fluctuating wildly from year to year. As a consequence, many farms failed, but enough survived to feed the booming American population.
- A second key element of the western economy was mining. The first great mining boom occurred in California in 1849. The next happened in 1859, when gold was discovered in Colorado and silver in Nevada. Mining booms followed a familiar pattern. An initial wave of small, independent prospectors collected the easy-to-find deposits near the earth's surface. Then, more sophisticated, heavily capitalized mining operations would move in. They possessed the equipment and know-how to bore deeply into the earth to extract massive amounts of gold, silver, and other materials, such as copper, lead, iron, coal, and zinc.
- The third major industry to develop in the West was ranching. Like farming and mining, it was also intimately tied to the modernizing and industrializing American economy.
  - When Texas entered the union in 1845, it did so with millions of longhorn cattle. Mexicans and Americans raised these cattle primarily for their skins and tallow, but as Americans began to eat more beef, ranchers realized that there were enormous profits to be made if they could get their cattle to Northern markets.
  - In 1866, Texas ranchers mounted the first of the *long drives*, encompassing more than 1,000 miles to Colorado. Soon, a second more prominent destination emerged in Abilene, Kansas, a stop on the Kansas-Pacific Railroad. By the late 1870s, more than 600,000 longhorns a year arrived in Abilene for sale and were then transported by railroad to Chicago for slaughter and distribution.

- The key figure in these great drives was the cowboy, who emerged as one of the great iconic figures of the American West.

## **Indian Wars**

- The central problem of westward expansion was the fact that hundreds of thousands of Native Americans already lived there and considered the land theirs.
- In 1865, approximately 360,000 Native Americans lived in the trans-Mississippi West. They were a remarkably diverse set of peoples, comprising 500 distinct tribes, each with its own language, religion, and traditions. However, the world of the Native Americans entered a period of crisis as a floodtide of white migration began moving westward.
- Relations between whites and Indians had always been complicated, but they seemed to deteriorate into violence for one simple reason: Native Americans possessed lands that white Americans wanted. For the first 250 years, white Americans solved this problem by either killing Native Americans or driving them further westward.
- To minimize conflict and maximize opportunities for white settlers, Congress eventually adopted new policies. In 1851, it established two Indian Territories, one in Oklahoma and the other on the northern Great Plains. Under this decree, the first Treaty of Fort Laramie, the U.S. government agreed to prevent white settlement in the territory, while the Indians agreed to allow westward migrants to pass peacefully through. But the hope for peace failed to materialize. Conflicts between whites and Native Americans in the West grew more intense.
- At the center of this conflict was a mindset of superiority shared by most whites when it came to viewing Native Americans. Most saw Indians as backward, pagan, violent savages who, because of their perceived lack of civilization, could not make a rightful claim to the lands on which they lived.

- Many white officials, as evidenced by the many treaties they signed with Native American tribes, honestly wanted to find a path to peaceful coexistence. But the attitudes of these officials and the treaties they produced had almost no impact on run-of-the-mill migrants heading westward.
- The migrants routinely violated the terms of agreements, such as the Treaty of Fort Laramie, by settling on Indian land. This was especially true whenever gold or silver strikes occurred. But the federal government failed to enforce the terms of the treaties by ejecting white trespassers.
- Instead, federal authorities often demanded that Native American groups sign new agreements that reduced the size of their tribal lands. When the authorities couldn't get all the leaders of the tribal factions to sign, they accepted the signatures of a minority group and declared the new treaty to be in force for all.
- When this pattern became common practice in the West after the Civil War, armed conflicts raged between white settlers and Native Americans.
- In these conflicts, several factors doomed the Native Americans, including disunity and the fact that in many cases, their battles with the U.S. Army were fought in close proximity to their entire communities, including women, children, and the elderly. This made them vulnerable to surprise attacks on their encampments. Further, Native Americans fought at a tremendous technological disadvantage to the American military. In the end, one by one, defeated tribes were removed from their tribal homelands and sent to reservations.

### **Remembering the American West**

- In 1883, as the last of the Indian wars moved toward conclusion, William Cody (Buffalo Bill) launched an entertainment venture he called the Wild West. Essentially a circus, Cody's entertainment

troupe traveled the country presenting authentic cowboys and Indians reenacting scenes from history, such as the cattle drives, Indian attacks on wagon trains, and Custer's Last Stand. Buffalo Bill's Wild West became a sensation, not only in the United States but around the world.

- Buffalo Bill played a key role in shaping a mythical West in the American imagination as a place of heroism, individualism, and success. These same themes were later picked up by Hollywood, television, and advertisers. In recent decades, a new western history has emerged that seeks to present the West as a more complicated place.
  - This new history takes into account the Native American perspective, as well as the struggles—and, often, the failures—of whites who migrated west, along with the role of big business and the effects of westward settlement on the environment.
  - Since the early 1990s, this interpretation of western history is now reflected in the way the story of the West is told in Hollywood movies and television programs. The image of the American West still looms large in the American imagination, but these days, it's an image that's much closer to reality than in days past.

### Suggested Reading

Philbrick, *The Last Stand*.

Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*.

West, *The Last Indian War*.

### Questions to Consider

1. How was the development of the American West linked to the economy of the eastern United States?



2. What significant industries, other than agriculture, developed in the West?
3. Why did Americans develop and embrace a romanticized vision of the American West in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century? How close was this image to reality?

# Smokestack Nation: The Industrial Titans

## Lecture 4

**T**he United States went from the status of a developing nation in 1865 to become the world's top industrial power by 1900. In this lecture, we will explore this dramatic transformation. We will begin by doing a quick overview of early industrialization before 1865 and detail the key factors that contributed to America's industrial supremacy. Next, we'll consider the emergence of the first big businesses: the railroad, steel, and oil industries. Then, we will examine the development of the art of selling as a crucial component of industrialization. Finally, we will see how and why many Americans—especially Andrew Carnegie—celebrated the Industrial Revolution as an overwhelmingly positive change in American life.

### Early Industrialization

- In the United States, industrialization got underway when Samuel Slater, an immigrant from England, designed America's first successful water-powered textile mill in the early 1790s.
  - The success of this mill led to imitators throughout New England. These operations were small-scale, usually involving only one or two mills. Yet the profits they earned enticed new entrepreneurs who brought a grander vision.
  - In the 1820s, a manufacturing operation was established in the town of Lowell, Massachusetts. Lowell prospered and grew into a thriving factory complex; it is often considered the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution in America.
- While Lowell and its imitators transformed the making of textiles in America, changes were afoot in nearly every trade. In the 1820s and 1830s, the old system of artisan production that dated back centuries in Europe began to give way to a modern capitalist system. Instead of producing only for the local market, entrepreneurs realized that if they could increase production, they could sell to faraway places. This thinking was facilitated by advances in transportation

and communication technology, most notably, the railroad, the steamboat, and the telegraph.

- Emerging entrepreneurs foreshadowed modern industrial and capitalist values by borrowing money to expand production. And they engaged in price competition, something generally forbidden under the artisan system. Entrepreneurs also began to pay a market wage, rather than the traditional just wage—one agreed upon by the master craftsmen of a particular trade. Under the new market wage, each employer paid the lowest wage the market would bear.
- In this early phase of industrialization, the changes in artisanal production didn't involve new technology. The first changes had to do with the process by which something was produced and the customary rules associated with making it. Shoemaking, for example, evolved from small-shop production to small-factory production—changing how production was organized—but the tools remained the same.

### **Factors Driving Industrialization**

- One of the reasons behind America's rapid industrialization from the 1850s to 1900 was that the country possessed essential raw materials for industry, such as coal, iron ore, lead, copper, silver, gold, petroleum, and wood.
- Another factor driving industrialization was cheap labor. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the United States boasted a young and rapidly growing population, stemming from a high birth rate and immigration. This growing population provided manufacturers with a virtually unlimited source of labor. Further, the country had no laws related to the eight-hour workday or minimum wage.
- A third factor behind America's rapid industrialization may be that the American people in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were especially inventive. One way to measure this ingenuity is to look at patents issued by the U.S. Patent Office, which rose from 4,500 in the 1840s to 125,000 in the 1870s. The entrepreneurial culture that developed

in the 19<sup>th</sup> century seems to have inspired Americans to invest time and energy in inventing new technology that would benefit society and make them rich.

- Finally, the government also played a vital role in America's rise to industrial greatness.
  - Owing to the nation's republican heritage, which insisted that government should remain small and unobtrusive, the government followed a laissez-faire approach to the economy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This policy left business with a free hand, greatly benefiting entrepreneurship.
  - Paradoxically, when the government did get involved in the economy, it did so on a large scale, for example, by enacting protective tariffs (taxes on imported goods), by granting lands and funding to promote railroad construction, and by supplying armed forces to suppress labor strikes.

## Railroads

- Railroads first appeared in the United States during the 1820s. These were primitive trains that covered only short distances. But in the 1830s and 1840s, railroad technology improved dramatically, and rail networks expanded at a rapid pace.
- By 1865, some 35,000 miles of railroad track covered the United States. These lines were small, financially unstable, and limited to regional service. That situation changed dramatically after the Civil War, when rail coverage expanded rapidly, growing to 193,000 miles of track by 1900. By then, the mom-and-pop railroads had been gobbled up by a small number of large national railroads, such as the Pennsylvania Railroad and the New York Central.
- Because they offered fast and inexpensive transportation, the railroads played a key role in developing the national industrial economy. Wherever they went, they opened new areas for settlement. Farmers flocked to new territories because the railroads enabled them to sell their products on the national

market. Shopkeepers, tradesmen, professionals, and others settled in the towns that developed near railroad junctions. The railroads themselves contributed to the national economy by consuming steel, coal, and wood.

- The large national railroads became America's first big businesses and pioneered many important business practices, such as incorporating and issuing stock. Issuing stock allowed a corporation to raise capital to expand its business. Stockholders stood to benefit because if the company earned a profit, the price of the stock would rise. Corporate profits also benefited stockholders in the form of dividends.
- The emergence of massive railroads forced owners to develop modern management practices, such as standardization of parts and equipment and of time zones. To manage the vast new commercial operations, railroad executives developed administrative structures, as well as new systems of accounting, information management, and pricing. These practices became standard among American corporations, from manufacturing and mining to retailing.

### **The Steel Industry**

- The importance of steel to the Industrial Revolution is difficult to overstate. Steel transformed nearly every aspect of American life in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, from industrial machinery to architecture, transportation, medicine, agriculture, and warfare.
- Like many of the great industries that emerged in this period, steel was intimately associated with one man: Andrew Carnegie. Carnegie entered the steel industry in 1870, when it was still in its infancy. Over the next 20 years, his operations expanded dramatically as he built factories outfitted with the most advanced technology and bought out his competitors.
- Carnegie developed many important practices for running a successful corporation, including investing heavily in new

technology, engaging in cutthroat competition, and watching costs to the point of obsession.

- Indeed, cost cutting led Carnegie to become a pioneer of *vertical integration*. That is, he not only built and bought steel mills, but he also acquired key enterprises tied to steelmaking, such as mines, smelting operations, railroads, and ships. Controlling these enterprises allowed him to lower his costs and guarantee steady delivery of crucial supplies.



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**On his first job at the Pennsylvania Railroad, Andrew Carnegie learned and, in some cases, helped to develop practices for running a large corporation.**

### The Oil Industry

- Like steel, the oil industry is intimately associated with one man: John D. Rockefeller. Born in New York in 1839, Rockefeller moved to Cleveland as a teenager. He seems to have been a natural entrepreneur. In 1863, at the age of 24, Rockefeller opened his first oil refinery.
- At the time, Cleveland was the center of an emerging oil boom, and most of the nation's oil refining was located there. Note that this first oil boom was almost entirely focused on providing refined petroleum products for illumination, mainly by kerosene lamps. When Rockefeller looked at the small-scale refineries in Cleveland, he saw ineptitude, efficiency, and waste; he also saw opportunity.
- In 1870, Rockefeller established the company he called Standard Oil and proceeded to buy out his competitors. By the early 1880s, he controlled more than 90 percent of the nation's oil-refining capacity.

- Like Carnegie, Rockefeller pioneered certain fundamental business practices. For example, he created the first trust, which replaced the *pool*—the secret collaborations of ostensibly rival companies in the same business that set prices and production limits so that all participants benefited.
  - Because pools had no legal framework, there was no way to take legal action against a member who cheated. Trusts, in contrast, were legally binding agreements that brought together many companies in the same industry under the direction of a board of trustees.
  - To join a trust, a company relinquished a majority of its stock in exchange for certificates that guaranteed it a share in the trust's profits. Rockefeller's Standard Oil trust grew to consist of 40 companies run by a single board hand-selected by Rockefeller himself.
  - Given the Rockefeller trust's extraordinary profits, many businesses in other industries soon formed trusts, as well.

### **The Art of Selling**

- One key development in the creation of a consumer economy in the United States was the invention of the department store. Before the 1850s, consumers had to visit many stores, each of which specialized in only a few products. But in 1846, an Irish immigrant named Alexander Stewart established in New York City what many consider to be the first department store. In one huge building on Broadway, he offered an incredible array of goods at fixed prices.
- Many people copied this model and added to it. By the 1870s, department stores offered a wide array of products and promoted shopping as an “experience.” Consumers were drawn to lavishly decorated stores that featured such conveniences as restaurants, telegraph offices, and banks.
- Other entrepreneurs developed retail venues that appealed to people's frugality and everyday needs. Frank W. Woolworth opened

his first five-and-dime store in Utica, New York, in 1879. Thirty years later, he owned 600 Woolworth stores across the country. Consumers who didn't live in cities could shop by mail order from catalogs offered by Montgomery Ward and Sears, Roebuck and Company.

- Yet another dimension of corporate America's efforts to boost sales and consumption was to reach beyond U.S. borders. The country had long been an exporter of agricultural products, and its sales of manufactured products to foreign buyers began to soar after the Civil War. By 1900, manufactured goods constituted one-third of all U.S. exports.
- In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, businesses increasingly devoted time and resources to promote consumption. Advertising focused on appealing to the fears and desires of consumers. At the same time, advertisers promoted brand loyalty by devising catchy slogans and jingles. In 1867, American businesses spent \$50 million on advertisements. By 1900, that figure had risen to \$500 million.

### Suggested Reading

Chernow, *Titan*.

Morris, *The Tycoons*.

Stiles, *The First Tycoon*.

Strouse, *Morgan*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What advantages did the United States possess in terms of resources, culture, technology, and public policy that facilitated industrialization after 1865?
2. How did the new technology of the Industrial Revolution represent both positive and negative change for American workers?



3. How did the emergence of the railroads as the nation's first big businesses shape industrial development?

# Andrew Carnegie: The Self-Made Ideal

## Lecture 5

One of the dominant ideas of America's Gilded Age was that of the self-made man, epitomized by the life of Andrew Carnegie. Carnegie came to America as a penniless immigrant and began his working life as a bobbin boy in a textile mill; later, he worked as a message boy and a telegraph operator. He went on to a position with the Pennsylvania Railroad and, ultimately, became the king of steel in the United States. In this lecture, we will define the self-made man ideal and examine the sources of its popularity in the Gilded Age. We will also take a look at some of the individuals who popularized the ideal and explore some of its problematic aspects.

### Defining the Ideal of the Self-Made Man

- The ideal of the self-made man celebrates a person who rises to success by virtue of his strong work ethic, can-do attitude, willingness to sacrifice, and willingness to take risks. Often, he lacks any special advantages and even faces formidable disadvantages.
- This ideal has long roots in American history, going back to the beginning of the colonial period. Indeed, most of the people who came to colonial America in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries were, by definition, aspiring self-made men and women. The majority came as indentured servants, hoping to eventually gain their freedom, land, and a chance for success. And enough of them succeeded to serve as inspiration to others.
- We also see the self-made man ideal in the life of Benjamin Franklin. He was born in 1706 into an unexceptional family. As a teenager, he served an apprenticeship to his brother, who published a newspaper.
  - But Franklin eventually ran away to Philadelphia and found work in a printing shop. From there, he worked his way up, eventually owning his own successful printing and publishing business.

- Later, in his famous *Poor Richard's Almanac*, Franklin dispensed hundreds of aphorisms related to achieving success, such as “A penny saved is a penny earned” and “Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.” More than a century later, Andrew Carnegie offered similar advice to aspiring young men.
- Although the ideal of the self-made man existed as far back as America’s colonial past, it took on unprecedented popularity and influence in the Gilded Age.
  - The ideal tapped into a fundamental element of the American character: individualism. From the earliest days of colonial America to the present, Americans cherished the notion of individualism, the idea that no matter who you are or where you began life, you have the freedom and opportunity to chart your own destiny.
  - The ideal’s popularity during the Gilded Age can be attributed to the transformation of American society brought on by rapid industrialization and urbanization. These forces dramatically altered and expanded ways in which one could achieve success—and failure—by obliterating some traditional trades and creating new ones.

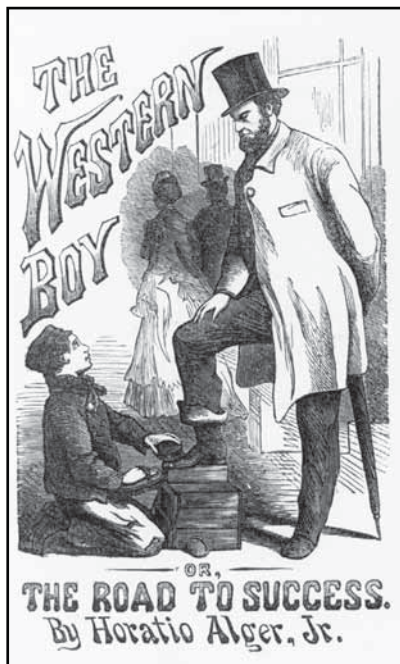
### **Popularizing the Ideal**

- The popularity of the self-made man ideal was also facilitated by an expansion in the availability of print literature.
- By far, the most successful and influential promoter of the ideal was Horatio Alger. Between 1866 and 1900, he published more than 100 short novels aimed at young boys, all with the same message: All that was needed to achieve success were hard work, honesty, thrift, ambition, and “pluck.”
  - Alger’s most famous book was *Ragged Dick or, Street Life in New York with the Bootblacks*. It first appeared as a serial in a magazine in 1867, and its popularity led Alger to publish it as

a book in 1868. *Ragged Dick* tells the story of Richard Hunter, an orphan living on the streets of New York who slowly learns the secrets of achieving respectability and success.

- All of Alger's protagonists begin life in terrible circumstances. They achieve success by working hard, being honest, and exhibiting heroic selflessness, often saving someone from drowning or returning a found bag of money to its rightful owner. Initially, the characters may seem to be lucky, but Alger's real message is that one should always seek opportunity and be willing to take risks.

- The Alger-inspired genre was so popular in the Gilded Age that it prompted Mark Twain to pen a parody. Twain's "The Story of a Bad Little Boy" is written in the style of Horatio Alger, but at every turn, the usual uplifting scenarios fail to materialize for the protagonist, the bad little boy named James.



The titles of Horatio Alger's books hinted at the theme that success could be achieved through hard work, honesty, and determination.

- It was not only novelists writing books for young boys who promoted the message of the self-made man. Some of the most famous people in the Gilded Age, including Andrew Carnegie, told and retold their own life stories

as tales of self-made men. Carnegie even developed a short talk, “How to Succeed in Business,” that he delivered hundreds of times to audiences of young men. Many self-help books of today find their origins in Carnegie’s speech.

- Carnegie’s celebration of the self-made man was part of his larger campaign to celebrate the Industrial Revolution and laissez-faire capitalism. He wrote many essays for popular magazines and several books. His most famous work, “The Gospel of Wealth,” was published in 1889. In it, Carnegie welcomes the widening wealth gap in America, saying, “Much better this great irregularity than universal squalor.”
- Carnegie also went out of his way to put a good face on industrial capitalism. Although many of his fellow tycoons denounced their critics in the press, Carnegie spoke only in positive terms about the virtues of industrialists, the nobility of labor, and their shared interests.
- In the 1890s, the Reverend Russell Conwell joined Carnegie in extolling the virtues of the new economy and the opportunities for self-made success. Conwell delivered a popular sermon titled “Acres of Diamonds,” in which he proclaimed that anyone who was intelligent, hard-working, and honest could become rich. The sermon was published as a pamphlet and sold more than a million copies.
- Trading cards, created by tobacco companies to boost sales, also lauded the self-made man. These card series were based on a number of themes, including baseball players, American presidents, and military heroes. The Duke Tobacco Company also produced a series titled “Histories of Poor Boys Who Became Rich and Other Famous People” that featured such figures as Cornelius Vanderbilt and Jay Gould.
- The ideal of the self-made man was so compelling that even Americans born into wealth—those who could not present themselves as having lived “rags-to-riches” stories—found ways

to portray themselves as self-made. The best example here is Theodore Roosevelt.

- Born into a wealthy Manhattan family and raised with the assistance of nannies and tutors, Roosevelt made certain that the public knew of the serious medical problems, particularly asthma, he suffered as a child. Indeed, his parents never thought he'd live to adulthood, but his father encouraged him to overcome his physical problems with exercise. He built a small gym in the family house and hired trainers.
- As Roosevelt told the story, he vowed to remake his body. And so he did through weightlifting, running, and gymnastics. Roosevelt claimed that this fitness regimen cured him of asthma, though medically speaking, that is impossible. Nevertheless, Roosevelt's asthma symptoms were greatly diminished, and he went on to a public career in which he was famous for leading what he termed the "strenuous life."
- Even people who existed on the margins of society strove to present themselves as self-made men. Consider the example of Booker T. Washington, an important civil rights leader in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. A key part of his public persona was the fact he had been born a slave and had risen to become, in the parlance of the day, the leader of his race. When Washington wrote what became a best-selling autobiography in 1901, he titled it *Up from Slavery* and presented his life story as one of triumph over adversity.

### **Darker Dimensions of the Ideal**

- For the most part, the ideal of the self-made man was presented in nothing but positive and optimistic terms: Anyone living in this great society can overcome adversity and achieve success. But some Americans took the ideal to its furthest extreme, embracing a concept known as *social Darwinism*. We saw a hint of this in Reverend Conwell's "Acres of Diamonds" sermon, in which he said, "There is not a poor person in the United States who was not made poor by his own shortcomings."

- When Charles Darwin published his theory of evolution by natural selection in 1859, he unwittingly provided some social theorists with the means to justify economic exploitation and inequality. British philosopher Herbert Spencer, social Darwinism's most enthusiastic champion, argued that competition among human beings led inexorably to the "survival of the fittest."
  - Although this surely was unfortunate for the "unfit" who wallowed in poverty, it was a law of nature, Spencer insisted, akin to the law of gravity. No amount of utopian theory, enlightened social policy, or Christian charity could alter this fact.
  - Spencer's counterpart in America, Yale sociologist William Graham Sumner, argued that "millionaires ... may fairly be regarded as the naturally selected agents of society," while a "drunkard in the gutter is just where he ought to be."
- Social Darwinism's hostility toward the poor was famously expressed in a widely reprinted sermon by the Reverend Henry Ward Beecher, the nation's most renowned preacher. Dismissing the claims of workers that they could not live in dignity on wages of \$1.00 a day, he asserted in 1877 that too many workingmen "insist on smoking and drinking beer." A frugal workingman could support his family on a diet of bread and water, argued Beecher, and "the man who cannot live on bread and water is not fit to live."
- Struggling workers and farmers in this period rejected social Darwinist claims that they were poor simply because they were losers. Instead, workers and farmers began to point accusing fingers at big business and Wall Street and the politicians that their wealth controlled.

## Suggested Reading

Alger, *Ragged Dick*.

Cawelti, *Apostles of the Self-Made Man*.

Nasaw, *Andrew Carnegie*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What was the self-made man ideal, and why was it so popular in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century?
2. How and why did such men as Andrew Carnegie promote the self-made man ideal?
3. What was social Darwinism, and why did many business leaders and wealthy Americans embrace it?



# Big Business: Democracy for Sale?

## Lecture 6

There was much to be excited about in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with all the wealth and technology being generated by the Industrial Revolution. But alongside these benefits came many alarming developments that left some Americans concerned about the future of their nation. In this lecture, we will examine the sources of rising anxiety over big business, including the specific reasons that Americans in the Gilded Age grew suspicious and resentful of large corporations. We will also touch on an idea that became the cornerstone of the Progressive Era: Given the new concentrations of wealth, the republic could be preserved only if the government took a more active role in regulating the economy.

### History of the Corporation

- The U.S. corporation has its origins in England, where the British crown created corporations to accomplish certain objectives that would benefit society. For example, the crown created such corporations as the East India Company to develop trade in Asia.
  - The British also created corporations to dig canals, construct roads, and establish ferries. In most cases, these corporations were granted special privileges or monopolies on certain activities that protected them from competition and allowed them to turn a profit for their investors.
  - These state-sponsored corporations were established by the government to benefit society as a whole. They were a far cry from our modern notions of corporations as private enterprises.
- After the Revolution, state governments in America initially granted corporate charters in a manner similar to Great Britain. These were mainly for projects seen as benefiting the public, such as construction of highways, canals, and railroads. But states also began to issue corporate charters to private, for-profit enterprises.

- At first, the number of these enterprises was small. In 1800, only about 100 for-profit corporations had been chartered in the former colonies.
- But as the Industrial Revolution took hold, states issued many more charters to private investors. By 1870, 100,000 such corporations existed and the number was rising. These new enterprises were almost entirely free of state control.
- In addition to the emergence of the private corporation, a second important development that marked the Gilded Age was the growth in size and power of some businesses. For example, before 1870, only a handful of factories in the United States employed 500 or more workers. By the turn of the century, there were 1,500 such factories.

### Concerns over Big Business

- Even in the decades before the Civil War, many Americans argued that corporations—especially those deemed monopolies—posed a threat to republican values, wherein power resides in the people. This attitude of resistance was especially true in the 1820s and 1830s, when Andrew Jackson and the Democratic Party argued that state-chartered corporations, even if supposedly in the interests of the common good, created an unholy alliance between private interests and public officials.
- Probably what concerned Americans most about the rise of corporate power and the growing economic inequities in the Gilded Age was the fear of the nation becoming Europeanized—that is, fear that the political culture was being transformed from a democracy based on republican values into a European-style monarchy.
  - Americans thought of themselves as freedom-loving people who believed in democracy, equality, liberty, and capitalism. The antithesis of these values was found in Europe. There, in full flower, prevailed monarchy, landed aristocracy, fixed classes, gaps between the rich and poor, established churches, social upheaval, and incessant warfare.

# HARPER'S WEEKLY.

A JOURNAL OF CIVILIZATION

Vol. XX.—No. 998.]

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 1876.

WITH A SUPPLEMENT  
PAGE TEN CENTS

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THE HEARTH-STONE OF THE POOR—WASTE STEAM NOT WASTED.—DRAWN BY MR. FREDERICK JEN.—[SEE PAGE 131.]

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Anxieties resulting from extreme disparities in wealth found their way into political cartoons, such as “The Hearth-stone of the Poor.”

- Nineteenth-century Americans were profoundly aware that these structures and institutions were precisely what Americans had broken away from in 1776.
- One key element in the rising fear of big business was declining opportunity. A hallmark of American political culture is that everyone is born with equal opportunity to better themselves. America did not guarantee equal success, but opportunities abounded for those who were willing to work hard, sacrifice, take risks, and play by the rules. This idea lies at the heart of the self-made man ideal. But in the Gilded Age, increasing numbers of Americans concluded that opportunities for the average person were disappearing.
- Gilded Age Americans were also concerned about the growing gap between the rich and poor.
  - Although the American commitment to individualism required the acceptance of some inequality in society, Americans also had the sense that extreme inequality runs counter to their understanding of how republican society prospers.
  - But when working- and middle-class Americans looked around in the 1870s and 1880s, they saw striking evidence of colossal fortunes being accumulated by a small number of individuals, such as Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Vanderbilt, and grinding poverty spreading among an increasing number of their neighbors. This situation belied the belief that American society had successfully avoided European-style extremes of wealth and poverty.
- Gilded Age Americans were greatly troubled by abundant evidence that big business was corrupting American democracy. Some of the most infamous political corruption scandals took place during this era.
  - The Crédit Mobilier scandal, exposed in 1872, involved massively inflated contracts related to building the transcontinental railroad, enriching two prominent

congressmen. In another outrage, Treasury Department officials and liquor distillers colluded as the infamous Whiskey Ring to defraud the federal government of excise taxes. In addition, many scandals percolated at the state level.

- Big business also seemed to enjoy influence in the judicial system, from local courts and judges all the way to the Supreme Court. Legal decisions bearing on business in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century overwhelmingly favored business over the public at large, including particular groups of the public, such as workers and farmers.
- A closely related development in the Gilded Age, disturbing to many Americans, was the aristocratic arrogance exhibited by some big business leaders. Almost every major industrialist had his own regrettable outburst that stuck with him for the rest of his life.
  - William H. Vanderbilt, for example, when asked by a reporter whether he ran particular express trains to earn a profit or to benefit the public, responded by exploding, “Accommodation of the public? The public be damned! We run them because we have to.” This outburst was a gift to Vanderbilt’s critics, who quoted it and appended it to political cartoons for the rest of his life.
  - Many Americans were also shocked by the aristocratic pretensions of the ultra-wealthy, with their mansions on Fifth Avenue and at Newport, Rhode Island, and their fondness for gaudy displays at grand balls and dinners.
- Finally, Gilded Age Americans grew increasingly worried in the face of surging labor-capital conflict. Between 1880 and 1900, the United States experienced an astonishing 37,000 strikes. This volume of strike activity was deeply troubling in its own right. Adding to the concern was the fact that many labor stoppages were enormous in scope. The Great Uprising railroad strike of 1877, for instance, was the first national strike and involved remarkable levels of violence, deaths, and mass arrests.

- One of the cardinal principles of American political culture—closely related to shared ideas about independence, equality of opportunity, upward mobility, and the self-made man—is that America is a society without fixed social classes. This is the primary way in which Americans saw their society as different from Europe's.
- But the sudden explosion of strikes in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century suggested that American society was settling into class stratifications. What did it mean that laborers referred to themselves as members of a besieged “working class,” oppressed by a greedy “upper class”? Was America devolving back into a European-style society?

### Reactions of Big Business

- The Gilded Age was marked by dualistic sentiments. On the one hand, it was an age of optimism that celebrated progress; on the other, it was an age of anxiety over the future direction of the republic. Big business leaders reacted to these concerns in a variety of ways. Some sneered at their critics, but others took steps to assure the public that the impact of industrial capitalism on American society was overwhelmingly positive.
- For example, many business leaders engaged in philanthropy, giving away millions of dollars to various causes. Andrew Carnegie led the way in this movement. By the time he died in 1919, he had given away nearly all of his fortune. His most famous legacy was Carnegie Hall in New York, but his philanthropic project with the greatest impact was building public libraries across America and around the world.
- A second way in which some industrialists sought to fend off their critics was to build model company towns. The most famous example here was the town of Pullman just outside of Chicago. It was created by George Pullman, who presided over the Pullman Palace Car Company, a manufacturer of luxury railroad cars.

- Pullman was an idealist who believed that workers and employers could work together in harmony for mutual benefit. Acting on this idea, he established the town of Pullman in 1880, a company town built and owned by the Pullman Company for its employees, who rented homes and patronized stores owned by the company.
- For a time, workers enjoyed living in Pullman, but in 1894, they staged a famous strike over wage cuts that paralyzed the nation's railroad system.
- Many other industrialists also established company towns and enjoyed positive press coverage that helped—for a while—to discredit critics and reformers who argued that unbridled industrial capitalism was inherently exploitive and needed government regulation.

### **Emerging Progressivism**

- Throughout much of the late Gilded Age, we see wide agreement that something had gone wrong or, at least, that troubling trends had emerged in American society, requiring solutions. But there was no agreement on precisely what to do about the situation. Ultimately, what took place was a profound reordering and redefining of key elements of American political culture.
- In its simplest form, this redefinition followed this path: From the founding of the republic up to the 1870s, American political culture insisted that government remain as small as possible, exerting the least possible influence in private life and the economy. This belief had its roots in traditional republican thinking, which argued that political power constituted a threat to individual liberty.
- After 1870, a new consensus began to emerge. In an age of powerful business enterprises and the men who controlled them—a concentration of power in ways inconceivable to the Founding Fathers—government came to be viewed less as a threat to republican values and more as the one institution that could protect

the power of the people. This notion is the core idea of what we call Progressivism.

### Suggested Reading

O'Donnell, *Henry George and the Crisis of Inequality*.

Tarbell, *The History of the Standard Oil Company*.

Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Why did many Americans in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century come to fear the power of big business?
2. What role did rising concerns over the growing gap between the rich and poor play in convincing some Americans to support measures to regulate the economy?
3. Why did the Supreme Court and Congress resist calls to curb the power of big business?



# The New Immigrants: A New America

## Lecture 7

**T**he Pledge of Allegiance was written in 1892 by Francis Bellamy, a Christian socialist minister. It was debuted on Columbus Day 1892, the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the New World. The pledge grew more popular in the coming years, but underlying its popularity was a profound fear among native-born Americans about mass immigration. Americans feared not merely the cultural, linguistic, and religious differences of immigrants but also what they perceived as a clear connection between immigrants and radical ideologies, such as socialism, communism, and anarchism. In this lecture, we will explore the period of immigration that took place during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era and consider the ways in which immigrants transformed American society.

### History of Immigration

- The easiest way to think about American immigration is to break it up into periods. The first period covered the colonial era through the early republic, from 1607 to 1815. Because America was part of the British Empire for most of those years, most immigrants hailed from such places as England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.
- The second period marks the advent of mass immigration, from 1815 to 1880. Historians refer to this period as Old Immigration, during which some 8 million immigrants arrived.
  - The period of Old Immigration transformed the United States in many ways. The cheap labor it provided helped fuel the Industrial Revolution and the early stages of westward expansion. It also reshaped important aspects of American culture, for example, making Catholicism the largest religious denomination in the United States.
  - Not surprisingly, these changes sparked fear and anger among many native-born Americans.

- The third period of immigration is known as New Immigration, which took place in the years from 1880 to 1924. The sources and volume of immigration changed dramatically in this phase. Whereas most immigrants had come from northern and western European countries during the previous period, the majority now came from southern and eastern European countries.
- The fourth period of immigration—from 1924 to 1965—is known as Restriction. During this time, Congress passed laws to constrain the flow of immigration, although some 5 million people still came to the United States during these years.
- The current period of mass immigration began in 1965, when Congress eliminated many of the previous restrictions. It has seen more than 30 million people arrive to begin new lives in America and continues to this day.

### **New Immigration**

- Between 1880 and 1924, more than 20 million immigrants landed on the shores of the United States. The two largest groups came from Italy and the Russian Empire, which at the time, included Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. A sizable majority of those from the Russian Empire were Jewish.
- The primary reason for migrating to the United States—in any period—has been the pursuit of prosperity. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, immigrants pursued economic freedom by acquiring industrial jobs or farmland through such programs as the Homestead Act. Tracking the rise and fall of annual immigration numbers against the U.S. economy shows that emigrants paid attention to the performance of the American economy and delayed their plans when they thought job prospects were poor.
- Potential immigrants learned about America from a number of sources, including advertisements of steamship companies and railroads and letters sent home by those already living in the United States. Such letters not only spoke of the glories of America but



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**Information about job prospects and other forms of assistance conveyed in letters home played a major role in reducing the fears of would-be immigrants.**

also conveyed useful information about the best ways to migrate and promises of assistance in finding housing and jobs.

### **Push Factors in Immigration**

- A primary factor in prompting emigrants to come to America was ethnic and religious persecution, such as the brutal persecution of Jews in the Russian Empire in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century or the campaign of persecution waged against the Catholic Church in Germany during the 1870s.
- Another push factor was military conscription. In some European nations, conscription could make a claim of anywhere from 10 to 25 years on a private citizen's life; in many cases, a young man who was conscripted would never see his family again.
- Yet another factor was population growth. Between 1860 and 1910, the population in eastern and central Europe increased by more than

75 percent. Because there was simply not enough farmland to go around, people began to look abroad for options.

- Finally, Europe's industrialization provided jobs for some, but for many others, it wiped out their livelihoods.

### Areas of Settlement

- Immigrants in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries settled throughout the country, from large cities to small towns and farmsteads. Given that many immigrants came seeking farmland, they naturally headed west to take advantage of the Homestead Act or to buy land from the railroads. Immigrants also flocked to work in mining and on the railroads.
- Of course, the Lower East Side in Manhattan is closely associated with immigration. During the period of Old Immigration, this area was shaped by an Irish district known as Little Ireland; a German district called Kleindeutschland, or Little Germany; and a black district known as Little Africa. In the midst of the New Immigration, the Irish neighborhood became Little Italy, the German neighborhood was transformed into a Jewish enclave, and the black residents began to move away in the face of an emerging Chinatown.
- Immigrants form these kinds of ethnic enclaves for two reasons.
  - First, they face discrimination by native-born Americans who refuse to let them live in their neighborhoods.
  - Second, ethnic enclaves make life easier for new immigrants. Within them are hundreds or thousands of people who speak the same language, share the same culture, and practice the same religions. Ethnic enclaves also provide an opportunity to meet people who can help immigrants get jobs and offer other forms of assistance. In addition, they provide important psychological comforts.

## **Native Reactions to Immigration**

- Americans have always had a love-hate relationship with immigration. We celebrate the immigration of our ancestors but often resent the immigration that takes place during our own era. That's because the arrival of new languages and customs tends to strike humans as strange and threatening. What did Gilded Age and Progressive Era Americans find threatening about the New Immigrants?
  - First, native-born Americans believed that foreign-born strangers from eastern and southern Europe would never assimilate into American culture.
  - Americans also recoiled at the poverty they saw in immigrant enclaves. Many considered mass poverty to be un-American and believed that misguided immigration policies imported poverty.
  - In addition, Americans read sensational accounts of lawlessness mayhem taking place in immigrant neighborhoods on a daily basis. Immigrants often were overrepresented in police arrests, which Americans took as proof that they were predisposed to criminal behavior.
  - Another threat Americans associated with immigrants was disease, largely because of frequent outbreaks of contagious diseases in immigrant neighborhoods. As with crime, most Americans blamed immigrants for the outbreaks, rather than the deplorable conditions in which they lived.
- The first major nativist movement, the Know Nothings, was inspired primarily by fear of Catholicism. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the arrival of millions more from Italy, Poland, and other regions of eastern Europe, these fears soared once again. But this time, with the arrival of 2.5 million Jews, anti-Semitism also flourished.
- American workers saw immigrants as stealing their jobs or, at least, as people who worked for less money and, therefore, lowered American wages.

- Many native-born Americans believed that the surge in strikes and other forms of labor unrest was not the result of low wages and exploitive conditions but the spread of un-American ideologies, such as socialism, communism, and anarchism, via the New Immigrants.
- Finally, New Immigration coincided with emerging notions of racial superiority and inferiority. We can see this in the way Irish immigrants were depicted as ape-like creatures in political cartoons in the 1870s and 1880s. It's also evident in the campaign of exclusion and violence waged against Chinese immigrants in the 1870s.
  - In 1894, opponents of immigration founded the Immigration Restriction League. This group lobbied Congress to require a literacy test of immigrants. The 1890s also saw passage of the Federal Immigration Act, which led to the construction of an immigration processing center on Ellis Island and other screening areas elsewhere.
  - Nativist sentiment continued to grow in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and calls for immigration restriction grew louder. This sentiment was strengthened by the popularization of theories of race that drew on pseudoscientific studies claiming that certain races were superior to others.
  - The theory of eugenics accepted ideas of racial superiority and inferiority and argued that the government should use this information to improve society by breeding out undesirable racial traits that led to alcoholism, poor health, and mental impairment. Believing that science could solve or diminish social problems, many Progressives embraced eugenics.

### Impacts of Immigration

- Eventually, the restrictionists prevailed. Congress enacted laws that greatly reduced immigration in the early 1920s. But by then, more than 20 million New Immigrants had settled in the United States. Like the newcomers who preceded them—and those that came later—these immigrants transformed American society.

- The New Immigrants played a major role in the industrial boom of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. They provided a seemingly inexhaustible pool of cheap and ambitious labor for America's factories.
- These immigrants also reshaped America's ethnic demography. Before 1880, the great majority of Americans were of European heritage, especially British, German, and Irish. By 1920, significant chunks of the American population traced their roots to virtually every corner of Europe, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean.
- Immigrants brought new kinds of food that became popular in America and part of the mainstream diet. They also brought linguistic, musical, dance, and other cultural customs with them, many of which influenced and reshaped American culture.
- Finally, the New Immigrants triggered a nativist response to exclude them. But this, in turn, prodded Americans who believed in immigration to articulate how these new human resources benefited the United States. This has led to the *multicultural ideal*—a set of ideas, terms, and values that praises the virtues of ethnic, racial, and religious diversity. This tradition of accepting new immigrants—along with arguments over its wisdom—continues to this day.

### Suggested Reading

Daniels, *Coming to America*.

Dinnerstein and Reimers, *Ethnic Americans*.

Kraut, *The Huddled Masses*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Why do people choose to immigrate, and why did so many choose the United States?
2. In what important ways did mass immigration in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era transform the United States?
3. What fears prompted the rise of a vibrant nativist movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century?



# Big Cities: The Underbelly Revealed

## Lecture 8

The United States went from being from an overwhelmingly rural and small-town society in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to a majority urban society by 1920. This transformation corresponded with the rapid industrialization and heightened social organization of America's Gilded Age and Progressive Era. In this lecture, we'll explore how Americans viewed cities in the decades leading up to the Gilded Age, and we'll look at key factors that led to the cities' rapid and unprecedented growth. We will also examine some of the problems and challenges that city dwellers encountered and their early attempts at solutions.

### Key Factors in Urban Growth

- In the years before the Civil War, few large cities had developed in America. Indeed, some Americans despised urban concentrations, not merely because they were crowded and dirty but also because traditional ideology argued that the ideal republic was one based on small towns and farms. Despite this anti-urban tradition in American culture, cities grew dramatically in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially after the Civil War.
  - In 1820, fewer than 1 in 20 Americans lived in a city. By 1860, 1 in 5 were urban dwellers. By 1890, urban migration accounted for 1 in 3 Americans. And by 1920, for the first time in history, slightly more Americans lived in the city than in the country.
  - Another way to measure urbanization is by the number of cities. In 1820, the United States boasted only a handful of cities; by 1860, there were nearly 400; by 1890, more than 1,300; and by 1920, more than 2,700. And many of these cities were true metropolises. In 1860, the U.S. had 9 cities with more than 100,000 people; by 1920, that number was 68.

- Industrialization was one of the most important sources of urbanization. By definition, industrialization requires large concentrations of people, capital, and resources. Thus, wherever new cities appeared or old ones boomed, we find one or more major industries. Pittsburgh, for example, had a population of 46,000 in 1850. The rise of steel and other heavy industries caused it to grow to 322,000 by 1900 and to 588,000 by 1920.

- It's important to note that the industrialization of agriculture was essential to urban growth. American farmers used the latest industrial technology to boost the output of their farms. Most notably, they bought steel plows and mechanical reapers that allowed them to farm larger tracts of land.

- Without this industrialization of agriculture, it would not have been possible to feed the nation's emerging large cities.

- Both immigration and rural-to-urban migration were also key factors in urban growth. Some rural Americans headed to cities because they were drawn by the thrill of urban life, but most went in search of economic opportunities.



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**By connecting the nation's largest city, New York, and its third-largest city, Brooklyn, the Brooklyn Bridge symbolized rapid urban growth.**

- Agriculture was becoming increasingly mechanized, which lowered demand for farm labor and displaced rural populations. Men and women who migrated to cities found a wide array of job opportunities, ranging from low-paid work as factory operatives, laborers, and domestic servants to more desirable positions as skilled artisans and clerks.
- Another significant rural-to-urban migration involved African Americans leaving the Jim Crow South after the Civil War. Drawn by word of better jobs and greater freedoms, some 300,000 African Americans migrated north between 1890 and 1910.
- Cities in this period also expanded by annexing surrounding towns and cities. The greatest annexation occurred in 1897, when some 40 adjacent towns and cities merged into the City of Greater New York.
- New technologies, such as mass transportation, modern communications, and skyscrapers, also contributed to urban growth.
  - The development of mass transportation, for example, promoted growth because it enabled city dwellers to live greater distances from their places of work and allowed cities to spread out and form commercial, residential, and other districts dedicated to specific activities. This was made possible by the development of the horsecar (essentially a trolley pulled on rails by two horses), steam-powered locomotive lines, cable cars, and underground railroads, or subways.
  - New communication technologies, such as the telegraph and telephone, also facilitated urban growth because they allowed people to communicate over great distances.
  - Other new forms of technology, such as steel, along with soaring real estate prices in business districts, led to the invention of skyscrapers. Before the Civil War, few buildings exceeded 6 stories. The invention of the electric elevator and new building materials, such as cast iron, led to the advent of 10- and 12-story

buildings by the early 1880s. By 1900, lower Manhattan alone featured 12 buildings of 300 feet or more in height.

- In response to concerns about crime and the desire of commercial interests to extend their hours of business, cities in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century also began to install street lights. Originally, these were dim gas lights, but in 1880, electric street lighting was introduced.

### Urban Problems and Solutions

- As cities grew in size, a range of serious problems emerged; for example, rates for every category of crime, from prostitution to murder, soared. American cities in this period also saw frequent outbreaks of rioting.
  - A primary source of this crime spike was poverty. Because a large percentage of the populations of cities lived in poverty, some turned to illegal means to survive—robbing or engaging in prostitution. Many also responded to their dire circumstances by drinking excessively, which increased the incidence of violence and disorderly conduct.
  - The anonymity of urban life was another factor in elevated crime rates. Unlike in small towns, where citizens typically knew one another, big cities were filled with hundreds of thousands of strangers.
  - Finally, there was the problem of trying to police 19<sup>th</sup>-century cities with 18<sup>th</sup>-century watchmen, who were generally poorly paid, untrained, and unarmed. To address this problem, New York City abolished its night watch in 1845 and established a professional police department. Other cities followed, and by the 1870s, the city patrolman was a ubiquitous fixture of urban life across the nation.
- The threat of fires loomed large in late-19<sup>th</sup>-century cities. With so many people and buildings packed into urban areas, a small fire that

got out of control could lead to catastrophic results, as in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871.

- Traditionally, cities had relied on volunteer fire companies that functioned essentially as social clubs rather than effective fire-fighting organizations. That began to change in the 1850s; under pressure from business leaders and the fire insurance industry, cities began to disband their volunteer fire companies in favor of full-time professionals.
- Equally important, cities invested in new technology, such as steam pumpers and fire alarm boxes connected by telegraph wires to fire department headquarters. In the coming decades, especially after the Great Chicago Fire, cities also toughened building codes to require fire-resistant designs and materials.
- A threat more dangerous than fire to urban inhabitants was the disabling outbreak and spread of disease. Far more people died each year owing to cholera, diphtheria, typhoid fever, and other maladies than because of fire.
  - In Chicago, for example, in 1891, 6,300 people died from just three illnesses: typhoid fever, bronchitis, and pneumonia.
  - To combat disease, cities established boards of health and took steps to improve water quality, waste removal, and street cleaning. Initially, however, these efforts were more symbolic than real and had only minimal effect.
- Squalid tenements were another problem in big cities, contributing to each of the other ailments. Multiple-family dwellings of four to six stories, housing dozens of families, became the most common form of housing for poor city dwellers by the 1860s. In 1865, two-thirds of New Yorkers—some 486,000 people—lived in tenements. By 1900, the total number housed in tenements had grown to about 1.6 million people.
  - Most tenement apartments consisted of two or three dimly lit and poorly ventilated rooms. Because housing that was constructed before 1900 typically offered no running water,

residents relied on shared backyard hydrants and wells, as well as backyard outhouses.

- Some efforts were made to reform tenement housing. An 1879 statute in New York City required new tenements to have air shafts between adjacent buildings to allow some light and air into interior rooms. But early reform measures were largely ineffective.

### Political Machines

- During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, city governments and budgets expanded dramatically. Although this expansion helped to mitigate some urban problems, it also led to the rise of the urban political machine.
- Political machines are organizations that were usually—but not always—associated with the Democratic Party. They became powerful in large American cities by mobilizing blocs of working-class and immigrant voters while developing favorable relationships with real estate and business interests. Some machines controlled small sections of cities, while others, such as New York's Tammany Hall, came to rule the entire metropolis. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, several local machines extended their power all the way to the state level.
- Several trends coincided to account for the rise of political machines in American cities. The machines benefited from rapid urban growth, which produced unprecedented opportunities for politicians to reward supporters with construction contracts that built in financial kickbacks to the machine. Urban growth also allowed machines to award supporters with jobs from an expanding pool of opportunities. In return, recipients of machine largesse were expected to vote for its candidates in elections.
- Machines also garnered support from immigrants by denouncing nativism and by hindering anti-immigrant legislation, such as proposals to deny public jobs to the foreign born. The growing numbers of poor, vulnerable city dwellers also provided a needy

constituency, for which the machines supplied a range of personal services and favors, including cash handouts, funeral payments, legal assistance, and more.

- Political machines may have acquired and retained power by providing services to their constituents, but they also engaged in voter intimidation and election fraud. Machines posted “tough guys” to intimidate voters and used their influence with the police department and local boards of elections to manipulate the vote count and ensure victory.
- Equally important was the enormous amount of money machines garnered by selling patronage jobs, demanding kickbacks from city contractors, and collecting protection fees from a vast economy of vice that the machine-controlled police allowed to flourish.
- Political machines were good for cities to the extent that they promoted urban growth and economic development and provided assistance to the poor in an era when the social safety net was all but nonexistent. At the same time, these electoral machines were also undeniably corrupt and operated in ways that violated basic notions democracy. Not surprisingly, they would soon come under intense scrutiny from reformers.

### Suggested Reading

Allen, *The Tiger*.

Cheape, *Moving the Masses*.

Lubove, *The Progressives and the Slums*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What factors led to the dramatic growth of cities in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century?
2. What problems emerged as cities grew into great metropolises?
3. What were political machines, and what roles did they perform in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century?



# Popular Culture: Jazz, Modern Art, Movies

## Lecture 9

**O**n the evening of February 17, 1913, the doors to the 69<sup>th</sup> regiment armory in New York City swung open to admit a modest crowd. As the people filed in, they saw an astonishing spectacle: as many as 1,600 paintings, sculptures, and other works by more than 300 European and American artists. The Armory Show—as it came to be called—was the first significant exhibition of modern art in the United States. Few Americans had ever seen anything like it, and the exhibition caused a sensation. In this lecture, we'll take a wide-ranging look at the ways in which the arts and entertainment in the United States were transformed during the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era.

### Changes in Art

- The Armory Show signaled a profound artistic and aesthetic shift that was underway in both the United States and Europe. The most popular American painters in the Gilded Age were impressionists, whose works tended to focus on pastoral scenes, urban vignettes, still lifes, and portraits. As wonderful as many of these paintings are, they were, in many ways, imitative rather than original.
- That was not the case with the so-called Ashcan school of American art in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These painters were part of the emerging realist tradition in the arts—a tradition that included literature, music, and other art forms.
- Realism emphasized depictions of contemporary social life, especially the lives of everyday people. For the artists of the Ashcan school, this meant painting scenes found in the gritty landscape of New York City's tenement districts, bustling streets, and smoky bars.
- Among the artists of the Ashcan school were George Bellows, Robert Henri, Everett Shinn, William Glackens, John Sloan, and Edward Hopper.

- Bellows is best known for his powerful and sensual depictions of boxing matches, such as *Stag at Sharkey's*. Sloan is known for his street scenes of the working-class tenement districts of New York.
- These subjects were quite different from the works of the previous generation of American artists.

### Changes in Literature

- Significant changes also occurred in American literature. The key figure in this transition was Mark Twain, the first popular American writer to break with the dominant traditions of 19<sup>th</sup>-century fiction.
- Twain was born in rural Missouri and grew up around farmers and people on the Mississippi River. He understood how the ordinary folk of the American Republic thought, acted, and spoke, an understanding that is reflected in his use of colloquial American speech and slang. Twain's decision to write in a realist style that captured the scenes and language of everyday people influenced other American writers to appreciate the American voice.
- Many scholars and literary critics consider *Huckleberry Finn* to be the Great American Novel. Indeed, Ernest Hemingway once wrote that all modern American literature—that is, truly American and not imitative of European fiction—comes from *Huckleberry Finn*.
- Twain also brought to his work social criticism and iconoclasm. In particular, he used irony and wit to expose the fallacies of racism and notions of racial superiority. This theme is at the center of *Huckleberry Finn*; it also appears in his novel *Pudd'nhead Wilson*.
- Many other writers, influenced either directly or indirectly by Twain, produced memorable works of realist fiction.
  - One was Stephen Crane, who wrote a haunting account of the Civil War, *The Red Badge of Courage*, in 1895. His other well-known work, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, tells the harrowing tale of a young, naïve girl who is born into poverty to an

alcoholic and violent family. Desperate to escape her cruel family, she is seduced by a slick young man who convinces her to live with him, then abandons her. When Maggie's family refuses to take her back, she is forced into prostitution. In despair, she eventually takes her own life.

- Other important writers in this realist genre include Theodore Dreiser, author of *Sister Carrie*; William Dean Howells, who wrote *The Rise of Silas Lapham*; Frank Norris, who wrote *The Octopus* and *The Pit*; Upton Sinclair, author of *The Jungle* and many other works; and Kate Chopin, who wrote what was considered a scandalous novel in 1899, *The Awakening*.

### Changes in Music

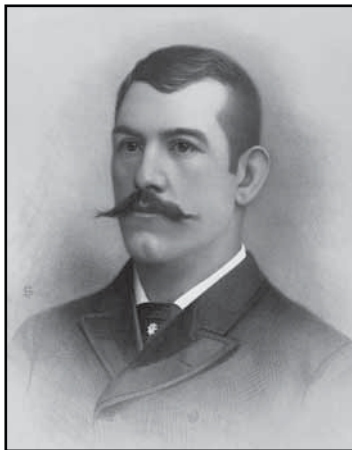
- The turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the period in which we see the emergence of three styles of popular music that are fundamentally American in origin: ragtime, blues, and jazz. All three originated in the African American communities of the South.
- Ragtime was one of the first of the three to garner the attention of the wider American public. It emerged after the Civil War, when African Americans discovered that they could find employment as musicians in clubs, saloons, theaters, and brothels.
  - The jaunty piano style we associate with ragtime first became popular as dance music in urban African American communities, such as St. Louis and New Orleans, especially in the red-light districts of those cities.
  - The term *ragtime* derives from the music's syncopated rhythms, which some called ragged. Ragtime moved into the American mainstream in the 1890s, when Scott Joplin began to publish his songs.
- At the same time that ragtime was becoming popular, another genre of music deeply influenced by southern black traditions was coming into its own: the blues.

- The origins of the blues can be traced to African American folk traditions that emerged over several hundred years of slavery. The style draws together many influences, including musical and vocal styles from Africa, black spirituals, slave work songs, and Euro-American folk music.
- Like ragtime, the blues started to become popular in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The man widely considered to be the father of the blues is W. C. Handy, even though he is more accurately regarded as someone who helped popularize the music.
- A musical form that also has deep roots in African American traditions is jazz. Although New Orleans is considered the birthplace of this style, it became popular outside of New Orleans in the late 1910s and afterward, when Jelly Roll Morton and other jazz performers began to play in major northern cities. The real heyday of jazz, of course, would come in the 1920s—a period often called the Jazz Age.

### American Entertainment

- The era of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era saw the emergence of several new forms of popular entertainment, many of which reflected the fact that increasing numbers of Americans were living in cities.
- One notable example was the emergence of the amusement park, which began with the opening of Water Chutes park by a Chicago entrepreneur named Captain Paul Boyton.
  - Water Chutes was a great financial success and inspired many imitators across the country, including the famous amusement parks at Coney Island in New York.
  - All of these amusement parks had one thing in common: They were located along trolley and streetcar lines, allowing fast and inexpensive transportation for the urban masses. By 1920, the United States boasted 1,800 amusement parks.

- Another popular form of entertainment was sporting events, especially baseball games. Hundreds of amateur, semipro, and professional teams formed in cities and towns across America in the years after the Civil War.
  - As the game's popularity grew, entrepreneurs came to see baseball as a business. They built large stadiums near one or more streetcar lines and sold patrons not merely tickets but also food, beer, trinkets, and scorecards.
  - College football also rose to prominence as an urban spectator sport. By the 1890s, college football games in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago often drew more than 50,000 fans.
  - Other spectator sports also enjoyed tremendous popularity in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Professional boxing, horseracing, track and field competitions, and bicycle races drew large crowds to such venues as Madison Square Garden in New York City, the Chicago Coliseum, and the Boston Arena.
  - Although sports enjoyed great popularity, many ministers and public officials decried the violence, alcohol consumption, and gambling associated with these sports. And many denounced the rising popularity of playing or viewing sports on Sundays.



**America's first celebrity athlete was the boxer John L. Sullivan; later in his career, Sullivan gave speeches and performed in small stage productions.**

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- The rise in popularity of spectator sports in the Gilded Age also led to the emergence of celebrity athletes. The first and, by far, the biggest star was the boxer John L. Sullivan.
- By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a typical city resident could also choose from a vast array of entertainment forms on stage.
  - In ethnic neighborhoods, for example, particular forms of Old World theater and performance flourished, from Italian melodramas based loosely on operas, to Yiddish comedies drawn from eastern European traditions, to German singing societies performing traditional favorites.
  - Elsewhere in the city, in more mainstream venues, people flocked to a new kind of theatrical entertainment: musical comedies. This distinctly American innovation was pioneered by the duo of Edward Harrigan and Tony Hart. These two were followed by other composers, including George M. Cohan and Irving Berlin.
  - Also popular was vaudeville, a kind of variety show aimed at a predominantly working-class audience. A typical vaudeville production featured a series of acts by jugglers, musicians, acrobats, singers, comedians, and scantily clad women. Many of the great performers on the American stage and screen from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century began their careers in vaudeville, including James Cagney, Mae West, and Al Jolson.
- Even though these varied forms of entertainment were developed and popularized in America's large cities, they quickly spread to communities of every size across the nation. They did so through the sale and distribution of sheet music for songs and, later, of recordings played on a phonograph. Pop songs also spread via touring companies of vaudeville performers, resulting in the emergence of a national popular culture.
- Another contributor to the emergence of a national popular culture was the advent of the film industry. In April 1894, Thomas

Edison opened the first Kinetoscope parlor in New York City. The response was overwhelming. The public found viewing short films through a peephole so enthralling that Kinetoscope parlors opened across the country.

- The Kinetoscope, however, proved a short-lived phenomenon because many people, including Edison, were developing projectors that would allow groups of patrons to view a film at the same time. They were also developing better cameras and longer films.
- The first theater dedicated to showing projected films opened in Buffalo, New York, in October 1896. Thousands more soon followed.
- As films caught on, they became so popular that new venues opened dedicated entirely to showing motion pictures: nickelodeons. The first one opened in Pittsburgh in 1905. Three years later, there were 8,000 such theaters across the country. And by 1910, some 26 million people a week were plunking down their nickels to see moving pictures.

### Suggested Reading

Hampton, *History of the American Film Industry from Its Beginnings to 1931*.

Ward and Burns, *Jazz*.

Zurier, *Picturing the City*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What was realism, and how did it change the way American writers and artists approached their work?
2. What were the common origins of ragtime, jazz, and the blues, and what set these new musical styles apart from mainstream American music after 1900?
3. What role did new technology play in the transformation of popular forms of entertainment in the United States?



# New Technology: Cars, Electricity, Records

## Lecture 10

On March 31, 1880, more than 1,000 people gathered in Wabash, Indiana, to witness what would be either a colossal failure or an epic moment in history. At 8:00 p.m., a band began to play and everyone looked to the top of the local courthouse, the tallest building in town. There, four arc lights burst into life, making Wabash the first community in America to be illuminated by electric light. In this lecture, we'll look at the impact of electricity as a transformative technology in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. We'll also consider two other technologies: the automobile and the phonograph.

### The Introduction of Electricity

- The history of electricity goes back to ancient times, when scholars, philosophers, and the curious tried to figure out what static electricity was and what caused it. Electricity remained a mystery and a curiosity until the 1600s and 1700s, when various scientists, including Alessandro Volta and, later, Georg Ohm, began conducting experiments with electricity. It was also during this period that Benjamin Franklin conducted his experiments.
- By the early 1800s, scientists and engineers had begun to develop ways of generating electricity and, eventually, to use it to operate small motors and machines. The earliest practical applications of electricity took the form of fire alarms, railway signals, and doorbells. These innovations used small batteries for their sources of electricity.
- By the 1870s, engineers had succeeded in generating far greater amounts of electricity, building increasingly powerful generators and dynamos that could power industrial machinery and sophisticated devices. The Corliss generator, for example, was a massive steam-powered machine used to power other machines at the Centennial International Exposition in Philadelphia.

- In 1879, Thomas Edison invented a successful incandescent light bulb, an illuminating technology that had many advantages over the earlier arc lights. He then formed the Edison Electric Light Company and signed a contract with New York City to provide outdoor lighting in lower Manhattan.
  - Edison built an electric power generation plant on Pearl Street and, on September 4, 1882, flipped the switch to illuminate a one-square-mile area around Wall Street and the financial district. The event generated headlines across the country and made Edison a household name.
  - Over the next few years, outdoor lighting by incandescent bulbs became the national standard, rapidly replacing old-fashioned gas lighting systems and the more recently introduced arc lights.
  - The next challenge was to bring incandescent lighting indoors. This process was spearheaded by those who could afford it. The owners of posh venues, such as theaters, opera houses, clubs, and mansions, replaced their dangerous and dim gaslights with less expensive, brighter, and safer electric lighting. Soon, hotels and office buildings introduced electric lighting. People could now read, work, socialize, and engage in other activities that had previously been reserved for daylight.
- Electricity also offered a cleaner source of power for urban mass transit, an alternative to horse-drawn streetcars on rails or steam locomotives. In 1888, an inventor and electrical engineer named Frank Sprague unveiled an electric trolley system in Richmond, Virginia. It proved so successful that within two years, more than 200 cities had contracted with Sprague to build similar systems.
- In addition, electricity transformed the workplace.
  - Long before they switched their machinery to electric power, factory owners introduced electric lighting to their facilities, enabling them to run their operations in multiple shifts and maximize the output of their machinery.

- By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, factory owners began to adopt electricity for a second purpose: to operate more powerful and versatile machinery. Historians cite this introduction of electricity to industrial manufacturing in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a key factor in what is termed the Second Industrial Revolution, which saw factory output soar to unprecedented heights.
- In fact, electrification not only boosted the industrial manufacturing economy, but it stimulated the wider national economy. Between 1875 and 1900, electricity became big business and attracted some of the era's notable financial kingpins, including J. P. Morgan.
- The transition to the new electrical economy was similar in impact to the transition we have all experienced in recent decades to the digital economy.
  - In addition to lighting, electricity also led to the invention of refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, and washing machines, transforming the American home.
  - Electricity transformed mass entertainment and mass media by facilitating the development of the film industry, the music industry, and radio.
  - And electricity stored in batteries played a vital role in the development of the automobile and the airplane in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- It's not surprising, then, that one of the major programs signed into law by President Franklin Roosevelt during the New Deal was a plan to spread electrification to the rural regions of the country. Rural electrification was needed, claimed Roosevelt, because, "Electricity is a modern necessity of life."

## **The Automobile**

- Early versions of the automobile were first invented in Europe. They relied on steam power and moved at a top speed of only 15

miles per hour. Automobile technology took a great leap forward in 1889, when two German inventors, Gottlieb Daimler and Karl Benz, independently invented automobiles that used internal combustion engines.

- Four years later, in 1893, two brothers living in Massachusetts constructed the first successful gasoline-powered automobile in America. In 1895, Frank and Charles Duryea won the first automobile race in American history. They sold their first car—the first gasoline-powered car sold in America—in 1896.
- In the 1890s and early 1900s, most Americans saw the automobile as nothing but an expensive plaything for the rich. Indeed, most Americans considered automobiles to be noisy and dangerous to horses and pedestrians. At the time, the automobile industry was also small and decentralized. In 1899, there were 30 auto manufacturers, but then, the industry took off. Between 1900 and 1910, 485 automobile companies were established.
- Although most of these manufacturers competed for the business of wealthy Americans, several entrepreneurs aimed their sights at the middle class. Ransom E. Olds, for example, introduced the first big seller in American automobile history, the Oldsmobile. With a relatively low price of \$650, Olds sold 5,500 vehicles in 1904.
- By then, another legendary automobile manufacturer was on the scene. In 1892, Henry Ford designed and built an automobile that he drove around Detroit. In 1903, he established the Ford Motor Company, specializing in affordable cars for the masses. In 1908, he introduced his famous Model T. Simple yet well designed and well built, Model Ts became the best-selling car in the world.
  - In 1913, having invested millions of dollars in innovative manufacturing processes, Ford unveiled the moving assembly line, which had a revolutionary impact on manufacturing. The time required to build a Model T was reduced by 80 percent, enabling a decrease in price from \$575 to \$345.



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**Henry Ford's revolutionary assembly line reduced the time required to build a Model T from 12.5 hours to 2 hours and 40 minutes.**

- Ford's competitors soon copied his techniques and developed new ones of their own. And the auto industry boomed. By 1920, there were 8 million automobiles on American roads. The automobile was no longer an expensive toy for the rich; it was considered a necessity by increasing numbers of average Americans.
- Like electricity, the automobile had a major impact on American society. Most notable was its economic impact.
  - Not only did Ford and his competitors employ tens of thousands of workers, but they also boosted existing industries and spawned entirely new ones. Economists refer to this as the *multiplier effect*. For example, the boom in auto manufacturing caused a similar boom in steel, glass, and rubber production.
  - Automobiles also led to the emergence of entirely new businesses, such as gas stations, auto repair shops, and motels.

Finally, popularization of the automobile led to a massive road and highway construction effort that continues to this day.

- In addition, the automobile brought about important social changes. Perhaps the most significant was a surge in the movement of middle-class families to the suburbs. Suburbanization, in turn, would lead to greater class and racial segregation.

### The Phonograph

- In American history before 1890, music was heard primarily in churches, theaters, concert halls, and saloons or at festivals, fairs, and parades. That began to change in the late 1870s, when Edison unveiled the phonograph.
- Edison captured sound as indentations made on a thin piece of aluminum stretched over a rotating cylinder. To reproduce the sound, he ran a stylus over the indentations and projected the sound. The sound quality was poor, but it was nonetheless the beginning of a slowly evolving revolution.
- Few people bought Edison's original machine, but other inventors in the 1880s—including Alexander Graham Bell—improved his design by using wax-coated cylinders instead of fragile aluminum foil and adding a horn to project sound.
- Edison and others assumed that the phonograph would be used by businessmen to record dictated letters or by the blind to hear recordings of books. But by the late 1890s, recorded music was becoming hugely popular. This trend was helped along by Emile Berliner, who invented a flat disc—the forerunner of the modern-day record or compact disc—to record and play sound.
- By 1910, recording and playback technology had transformed music into a booming industry. The phonograph also allowed for the privatization of the musical experience and led to what economists refer to as the *winner-take-all effect*. That is, only a

few performers emerge as high-paid superstars, while most of the rest languish and disappear.

- Finally, the ability to listen to identical recordings of particular songs led to the emergence of *mass culture* among Americans. In other words, the nation's unique regional cultures and traditions faded in significance before a single overarching culture, much of it controlled and shaped by big business.

### Suggested Reading

Jonnes, *Empires of Light*.

Snow, *I Invented the Modern Age*.

Suisman, *Selling Sounds*.

### Questions to Consider

1. In what important ways did electricity significantly alter key aspects of American life?
2. How did the emergence of the automobile boost the American economy?
3. How did the invention of recording technology change the ways Americans produced and experienced music?

# The 1892 Homestead Strike

## Lecture 11

The industrial enterprises that emerged during the Gilded Age ultimately depended not only on the genius of such men as Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller but also on the collective labors of American workers. New and increasingly complex technology enabled this workforce to produce an astonishing volume of industrial products and finished goods. And industrial workers' employment numbers soared, from about 1.3 million in 1860 to 5.5 million by 1900. But working families faced hard times as mechanization displaced many in the skilled trades and immigration produced a surplus of unskilled labor. In this lecture, we will consider the impact of the Industrial Revolution on American workers during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era.

### Workers' Changing Lives

- The Industrial Revolution's incessant introduction of new technology accomplished more than increased manufacturing output; it dramatically changed most workers' lives.
  - Mechanization meant low-skilled laborers, who took less time to train and, more importantly, could easily be replaced. As a result, employers could pay industrial workers relatively low wages and demand longer hours. Any worker who complained or failed to keep up could be fired and replaced with another low-skilled worker.
  - Great numbers of industrial workers who had started working while still in their teens to become skilled metalworkers or tailors—looking forward to a lifetime of good wages and stable employment—found themselves forced to take low-wage jobs in their 30s and 40s, often producing in mechanized factories what they had once made by hand.
  - This mechanization trend took place unevenly across America. Not all workers had their lives upended. For example, in



construction trades, such as carpentry and bricklaying, technology did little to undermine skilled craftsmen.

- And, of course, technology created new opportunities for some workers. Many found well-paid work as skilled mechanics. Others became foremen and floor managers. These more fortunate workers often enjoyed far higher wages, shorter hours, and better treatment compared to the unskilled.
- New technology was but one difficulty that workers confronted during the age of industrialization. Most also complained about long hours and low wages. Although averages varied by industry and region, workers often toiled 12 hours a day, six days a week, for wages that barely covered basic living expenses. By some estimates, the average wage earner made \$400 to \$500 a year in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when \$600 to \$800 was considered the bare minimum to live decently.
- The boom-and-bust nature of the new economy further weakened the precarious position of industrial workers. Severe depressions and recessions interrupted periods of prosperity and economic growth. Each depression brought widespread business failures and rates of unemployment as high as 25 percent, which sometimes lasted for several years.
  - The Panic of 1873, for example—which ushered in a depression—resulted in the loss of more than a million jobs and nearly 50,000 businesses. Workers fortunate enough to retain their jobs often found their wages slashed and their hours increased.
  - The few labor unions that existed at the time also suffered because high unemployment prevented the collection of dues, giving employers the upper hand in negotiations and pushing desperate workers to cross picket lines.
- Monotony was another problem brought on by the Industrial Revolution. Many workers found themselves forced to perform the

same task repeatedly, such as pulling a lever. Some felt, in the words of a machinist in 1883, that they were becoming “part of the machinery,” a state of affairs they found “very demoralizing.”

- Each year between 1880 and 1900, an average of 35,000 industrial workers was killed on the job and another 500,000 were injured. Most injuries stemmed from a lack of attention to safety on the part of factory owners. In coal mining alone, some 50,000 workers died between 1870 and 1914—an average of 1,136 per year. With no laws to compel them to make the workplace safer, few industrialists were willing to incur the expense.
- Another controversial trend was the sharp rise in child labor. Between 1880 and 1900, the number of wage-earning children younger than 16 skyrocketed from 180,000 to 1.7 million. A few states passed laws prohibiting child labor, but these were rarely enforced.
- The greatly increased power employers exercised in the workplace was one of the most significant features in the transformation of workers’ lives brought on by industrialization. Because employers’



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**Employers liked using child workers because they could pay them a fraction of the wages paid to adults and because children were more likely to accept authority.**

paramount goal was to earn a profit, they imposed strict discipline on their workers.

- Before the Civil War, it was common practice to start work in “the early morning”—perhaps an hour after sunrise—but now, workers had to begin and end their days at precise times.
- The same was true of the occasional breaks permitted. Workers who arrived late or took unauthorized breaks could be fined or fired. Alcohol consumption in the workplace, long a revered tradition, was banished. In some factories, workers were forbidden to talk to one another or even to whistle.
- The person who enforced these rules, the manager or foreman, was an increasingly important figure in the industrial workplace. Although many foremen came from working-class backgrounds themselves and treated workers fairly, others could be abusive, especially those overseeing workers of different ethnicities.
- The highest expression of this desire to exert control over workers was Taylorism, a practice named for Frederick Winslow Taylor. During the 1890s, Taylor pioneered time-and-motion studies, promising to generate savings in labor costs by studying work processes and devising more “scientific” and efficient methods. Taylor noted that the standardized methods he proposed must be enforced by management.

### **Knights of Labor**

- Feeling buffeted by the Industrial Revolution, American workers started to push back. Through labor newspapers, in speeches at worker rallies, and through strikes, workers articulated a sharp critique of the new industrial order.
- Their objections stemmed from a growing conviction that greedy monopolists—in league with unscrupulous politicians—had seized control of the economy and bent it to their own selfish advantage.

In other words, workers didn't denounce capitalism; rather, they deplored its perceived corruption.

- American workers argued that they received smaller shares of the wealth they created, even as they worked increasing hours in inhumane conditions. The upward mobility celebrated by Andrew Carnegie and Horatio Alger was harder to attain, despite the workers' efforts.
- Angered by the decline in the quality of their lives, Gilded Age workers began to organize labor unions. The union that became dominant was the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor. The Knights became the world's largest industrial union for a number of reasons.
  - First, the national economy recovered from the mid-1870s depression. Unemployment dropped and wages rose, providing wage earners with the economic security to form and join local unions in large numbers.
  - Second, the rise of the Knights can be attributed to the emergence of new leadership. In 1879, a young machinist named Terence Powderly took over as "Grandmaster Workman." Powderly was an excellent organizer and inspirational orator.
  - Third, the Knights offered an attractive message of reform. Part of this was ideological: The Knights' harsh critique of laissez-faire capitalism found widespread support among wage earners. Union leaders promised a positive, almost utopian, alternative vision of the future, with an 8-hour workday, equal pay for men and women, the prohibition of child and convict labor, and more. The Knights also generated labor support through their successful leadership of strikes, including several high-profile ones.
  - Fourth, unlike earlier craft unions that admitted only skilled workers, the Knights were open to all industrial workers,

including unskilled immigrants, African Americans, and eventually, women.

- Yet another attractive aspect of the Knights of Labor was that it was a federation of unions; it was made up of thousands of locals that enjoyed a great deal of autonomy.
- These attributes contributed to the jump in Knights of Labor membership from 10,000 in 1879 to a peak of more than 700,000 in late 1886.

### **Decline of the Labor Movement**

- As the Knights of Labor grew larger in membership and influence in the mid-1880s, employers and conservative politicians grew alarmed at its warnings about class conflict and demands for economic reform. Terrence Powderly and other Knights leaders were denounced as radical socialists bent on promoting violence and class warfare. This made many Americans leery of the Knights and organized labor in general.
- Driving the anxiety was a boom in labor strikes. Between 1880 and 1900, the United States experienced an unprecedented 37,000 strikes. Although many were small, local affairs, others were among the largest in American history. These included the railroad strike of 1877, also known as the Great Uprising; the Homestead Strike of 1892; and the Pullman Strike of 1894.
- The strikes ignited extraordinary levels of violence that terrified Americans. Between 1870 and 1914, somewhere between 500 and 800 American workers were killed during labor stoppages—nearly all by the military, state militias, or police. Keep in mind that Americans in this period associated social turmoil and its suggestion of violent revolution with aristocratic, class-bound Europe, not republican America.
- The Haymarket Riot of 1886, which took place in the aftermath of the police killing of a striking worker, ultimately played a key

role in the demise of the Knights of Labor. In the months that followed the riot, hundreds of labor activists were arrested. In the coming years, organized labor faced increasingly hostile actions by conservative politicians and courts that curtailed their ability to organize and go on strike.

- Internal divisions also weakened the Knights of Labor. Skilled members grew dismayed over a series of policy changes they believed were aimed at diminishing their influence within the organization. They also worried that the Knights were too prone to strike, which brought organized labor unwanted criticism.
- As a consequence, 25 unions of skilled workers broke away from the Knights of Labor in 1886 and founded the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Membership in the Knights dwindled rapidly. The AFL would grow to 1.6 million members by 1904.

### **Outcome for American Workers**

- Historians and economists still debate the question of whether, on balance, the Industrial Revolution benefited or harmed American workers.
- Workers in this period had less freedom and independence in the workplace, and many found themselves stuck in monotonous jobs with limited prospects for advancement. Workers also faced many threats to their well-being, especially injury or death on the job. Finally, hostile employers, politicians, and judges made it hard to form unions that could fight for the rights of labor.
- But with these challenges also came benefits, including rising wages, greater consumer choice, the spread of information and literacy, cheaper and more plentiful food, and a rising life expectancy.
- In the end, there is no easy answer to the question of the impact of the Industrial Revolution on American workers.

## Suggested Reading

Green, *Death in the Haymarket*.

Martelle, *Blood Passion*.

Watson, *Bread and Roses*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What aspects of the Industrial Revolution did American workers criticize and work to overcome?
2. Why did American business and political leaders exhibit such hostility toward labor unions?
3. On the whole, did the Industrial Revolution represent a positive or negative development for American workers?

# Morals and Manners: Middle-Class Society

## Lecture 12

Most Americans like to think of their nation as predominantly middle class, even though the term *middle class* has always defied easy definition. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify certain aspects of a middle-class culture and lifestyle, nearly all of which first appeared in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In this lecture, we will cover a little background on the idea of the middle class and the factors that led to its emergence. We will then explore the geographical space that is closely associated with the middle class: the suburbs. Finally, we will examine some important values associated with the middle class and take a close look at how the middle class lived.

### Emergence of the Middle Class

- Early manifestations of the American middle class emerged in the decades leading up to the Civil War, but the trend really took hold in the Gilded Age. Middle-class Americans were, essentially, the winners of the Industrial Revolution—those who got ahead amid great changes.
- As we've seen, the Industrial Revolution upended the lives of some American tradesmen, who saw their livelihoods as tailors and shoemakers eliminated by industrial manufacturing. But industrialization also created an extraordinary array of new jobs and opportunities. While many people labored as low-paid factory workers, some managed to secure better jobs as factory foremen, managers, and mechanics. As industry grew, it also demanded a growing army of salesmen, clerks, secretaries, supervisors, telegraphers, and accountants.
- The people who filled these jobs were members of the new and growing middle class. With these jobs came higher incomes and benefits, including, by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, paid vacations and



pensions. Middle-class jobs also carried higher social prestige, requiring far less physical effort than working-class employment.

## **The Suburbs**

- Just as middle-class Americans tended to hold particular kinds of jobs, they also lived in particular places, specifically, the suburbs. The very concept of the suburbs dates back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and the idea of having the best of both worlds: People could work in the dirty, smelly, and dangerous city—where the greatest opportunities existed for making money—but live outside the city limits, in a place that was quiet, clean, and beautiful.
- Beginning before the Civil War, two factors combined to promote suburbanization; the first of these was the celebration of nature.
  - Although many Americans found cities to be exciting places of opportunity, others considered them unnatural, unhealthful, and immoral. Thus, many Americans turned to the city's opposite: pristine nature.
  - From the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau to the landscape paintings of Thomas Cole, there emerged a romantic celebration of nature as spiritual, healthful, and morally uplifting. This attitude, in turn, inspired the urban park movement: the idea of bringing nature into the city.
  - Urbanization and the celebration of nature also gave rise to the promotion of suburban living. The “father” of this movement was the landscape architect and horticulturalist Andrew Jackson Downing, who wrote extensively about the superiority of life in the suburbs versus life in the city.
- Another factor that promoted suburbanization was transportation technology, particularly the steam-powered locomotive. As railroad networks formed and connected cities in the 1830s and 1840s, they allowed for the development of suburbs. Real estate developers could now advertise suburban communities with the promise of

homes in idyllic settings that had easy access via railroad to urban centers.

- Captivated by the suburban ideal, many Americans in the 1840s and 1850s moved to the suburbs, where they purchased beautiful single-family homes surrounded by lawns. But early suburbanites had to be quite wealthy in order to afford the costs of commuting by steam railroad to and from the city. After the Civil War, this limited trend toward suburbanization expanded dramatically, driven overwhelmingly by the new American middle class.
- One distinct result of suburbanization was the creation of middle-class communities of like-minded people from similar ethnic and religious backgrounds. This fostered the development of a new set of middle-class values, tastes, and social patterns.

### Middle-Class Values

- Class is not defined simply by one's income; it has much to do with values, attitudes, and habits. Middle-class Americans viewed themselves as embodying a respectable middle ground between the coarse, ill-mannered, uneducated, undisciplined, and intemperate masses below them and the lazy, profligate, pretentious, and materialistic elite above them.
- Middle-class Americans signaled their respectability by the neighborhoods in which they lived, their clothing, the adoption and use of manners, the conscious use of proper English, and higher standards of personal hygiene.
- Another key marker of middle-class respectability was self-control. Thus, middle-class families prized thrift and the careful management of finances. This set them apart from working-class Americans, whom they believed frittered away their meager earnings on beer and entertainment. And it set them apart from members of the upper class, who indulged uncontrolled appetites for yachts, mansions, and too much food and drink.

- Not surprisingly, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a booming temperance movement that urged Americans to forego alcohol. Teetotalers argued that alcohol was a waste of money, harmed the health, imperiled morals—especially if consumed in a saloon—and fostered domestic abuse.
- In addition to respectability, a second important middle-class value was the emphasis on the family and the home. Just before the Civil War, a new ideal emerged for middle- and upper-class families referred to as the *cult of domesticity*.
  - Middle- and upper-class Americans began to celebrate the home as the center of all things decent, uplifting, and holy. The key person in this ideal was the woman, who ruled the home as mother and wife.
  - The Industrial Revolution contributed mightily to the cult of domesticity by supplying inexpensive manufactured goods, such as clothing, that women in preindustrial eras had spent much of their time producing for their families. In this way, the Industrial Revolution allowed women time to do many other things.
  - Industrialization also separated work and home, assigning men to the “separate sphere” of the factory or office. Because men were rational, naturally competitive, and impulsive, they belonged in a sphere that was beyond the home. Women, in contrast, belonged in the sphere of the home, where they could use their natural virtues of purity, spirituality, and morality. The woman’s job was to raise good Christian citizens and to civilize and restrain their husbands, who otherwise might stray from the path of righteousness and sobriety.
  - Although the cult of domesticity developed in the decades before the Civil War, it blossomed as never before during the Gilded Age. We can see this in the hundreds of books written during this time to instruct American women on creating the ideal home life. We also see the emphasis on the cult of domesticity

in the popularity of the piano, which was seen as wholesome entertainment for families.

- Another distinct feature of the middle-class home was the relatively small number of children. The decreasing number of families who lived on farms required fewer children for labor. In addition, advances in medicine meant that families could expect more of their children to survive to adulthood. As a consequence, the American birthrate declined steadily throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
  - Fewer children meant that middle-class families could devote more time and resources to rearing children. And middle-class incomes made it unnecessary—indeed, undesirable—for children to work beyond basic household chores.
  - Instead, children received more education both in school and at home.



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**The popularity of the piano in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was, in part, the result of industrialization, which facilitated the production of high-quality but affordable pianos.**

### Middle-Class Life

- One of the central characteristics of the middle class was consumption. By definition, middle-class families had what today we call disposable income. And as the Industrial Revolution turned out vast quantities of manufactured goods—everything from shampoo and toothpaste to dresses and shoes—the middle class found endless ways to dispose of this income. These were the

customers sought by the builders of the great new department stores of the age, and they were the prime targets of modern, wide-ranging forms of advertising.

- A related feature of middle-class life was leisure. Middle-class people not only had money to spend but time in which to spend it. For men, this was a direct benefit of white-collar jobs that paid them well and left the weekends free for family life. For women, increased time derived from the fact that few housewives worked for wages after marriage, and many could afford to hire domestic servants. Much of their newfound leisure time was spent at home, but middle-class families also attended sporting events, went to the theater, and took vacations.
  - Americans began to let go—at least a little bit—of the Puritan notion that work was a virtue and leisure a vice. In part, this transition was promoted by the medical profession, which in the 1870s and 1880s, began to grapple with various ailments, such as neurasthenia, which today we see as symptoms of work-related stress. Doctors argued that leisure time away from work was essential for good health.
  - The movement to legitimize the vacation was also facilitated by religious denominations. The Methodists sponsored hundreds of vacation resorts that featured only wholesome activities and prohibited smoking, drinking, and other ostensibly sinful pursuits.
  - The railroads also contributed to the rise of the American vacation. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, railroad companies discovered that they could profit by running lines to the mountains and the seashore and building hotels and resort facilities.

### **Membership in the Middle Class**

- Membership in the middle class was open to anyone who could afford it and knew how to act. We see this in the experience of late-19<sup>th</sup>-century Irish Americans. The Irish who arrived in the 1840s and 1850s had faced intense discrimination from native-

born Americans, who loathed them for their poverty, drinking, clannishness, and Catholicism. But by the 1870s, an Irish American middle class had begun to develop.

- This was true of other ethnic groups, as well. And it was true for black Americans, although like virtually everything else in this era, they enjoyed middle-class life segregated from mainstream white society.
- The middle class that emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century had certain identifiable characteristics, habits, and trends associated with it, but it was also a fluid and evolving class that would continue to change in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Suggested Reading

Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class*.

Laderman, *Rest in Peace*.

Samuel, *The American Middle Class*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What is the definition of middle class?
2. What factors led to the emergence of the American middle class?
3. What are some of the core values that defined the middle class in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century?

# Mrs. Vanderbilt's Gala Ball

## Lecture 13

One of the most notable developments of the Gilded Age was the emergence of the super-rich as a highly visible and self-confident group in American society. This group rejected the traditional ideal of republican simplicity that had been a core social and political value in America in favor of a lifestyle that ostentatiously displayed their stupendous wealth. In this lecture, we'll explore the many ways in which the super-rich of the Gilded Age demonstrated this wealth and the power that came with it. We will also consider various groups and individuals who criticized this behavior as a threat to the social, political, and moral underpinnings of the republic.

### Republican Simplicity

- Republican simplicity was a core of the ideology that had animated Americans in their quest for independence and in building a republican government. True republicans, the thinking went, strove to live lives of virtue. Virtue, in turn, meant not only being honest and hardworking but also putting high ideals, such as public service, self-sacrifice, and reverence for the common good, ahead of all others concerns, especially private ones.
- The men and women of the founding generation looked to exemplary figures of ancient Greece and Rome for models of such behavior.
  - The ancient Roman Cincinnatus, for example, willingly left his small farm to take up political and military leadership in a time of crisis, triggered by an invasion of neighboring enemy tribes. Then, his job done, he resigned his political and military powers and returned to his plow. He could have easily consolidated his power as dictator; instead, he acted with virtue and returned power to the Senate.
  - With this kind of model behavior in mind, American republican ideology regarded the selfless public servant and private citizen with great esteem.

- An important corollary to this ideal of civic virtue concerned proper behavior for those who accrued wealth. Wealth was an inevitable outcome in a free society and it was a good thing, but only if the wealthy conducted themselves virtuously. In simplest terms, this meant that the wealthy should avoid ostentatious displays of money and privilege.
- Here, it is helpful to consider what Americans in the founding period and the early republic had in mind as the foil to the proper republican life. The antithesis of the virtuous republican was the European aristocrat, who lived a decadent life—a life of luxury. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, *luxury* had the connotation of living off the labor of others and scheming to find ways to extract money from those who were virtuous and hardworking.
- Of course, the ideal of republican simplicity was just that—an ideal. One did not have to look far in America of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to find examples of people who lived in luxury. Nonetheless, republican simplicity remained an important ideal for many decades. Indeed, by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, as tensions over slavery rose, one of the primary critiques of southern slaveholders was that they strove to live lives of European-style luxury and idleness by relying on the labor of slaves.

### Demonstrating Wealth and Power

- The super-rich of the Gilded Age displayed their wealth and power in countless ways. Perhaps the most vivid and lasting monuments to their aristocratic ambitions are the mansions they constructed.
  - By the 1880s, every large American city had a street on which the rich and powerful were constructing monumental homes, such as Nob Hill in San Francisco, Lake Shore Drive in Chicago, and the Main Line in Philadelphia.
  - By far the best known was Fifth Avenue in New York. By the 1880s, it was known as Millionaires' Row, the home address of the Vanderbilts, Morgans, Astors, and Carnegies.





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**With nearly 140,000 square feet of floor space, The Breakers, built by the Vanderbilts, featured 37 rooms filled with opulent furnishings and another 33 rooms for the help.**

- One of the most famous homes on Fifth Avenue was the mansion built by William Vanderbilt in 1883. What made it especially noteworthy was the ball hosted by Mrs. Vanderbilt to celebrate the completion of the mansion.
  - Mrs. Vanderbilt invited 1,000 of New York's wealthiest citizens to what was billed as a costume ball. She spent \$250,000 on the event (\$6 million in today's money), and her guests spent lavishly on their costumes. The most popular theme was to dress as European royalty—Louis XIV, Marie Antoinette, and so on.
  - Clearly, none of these people worried about appearing “un-republican” by putting on the finery of European aristocrats

in a mansion that resembled a European palace. Instead, they seemed to gleefully claim a link to the European aristocracy.

- Of course, the Vanderbilt ball and other such events were covered in the press, in what came to be called the society pages. There, middle- and working-class Americans could also read in gushing detail about the European tours, impending weddings, and scandals of high society.
- In addition to mansions in New York, Chicago, and other cities, the super-rich also constructed massive vacation homes in seaside retreats, such as Newport, Rhode Island. The most famous of these was The Breakers, built in the 1890s at Newport by the Vanderbilts.
- The quest for aristocratic status did not stop with mansions and fancy balls. Some families weren't content merely to appear to be aristocrats; they wanted the real thing. Thus began the mania for American "dollar princesses"—wealthy young women who married impoverished European royalty to acquire titles. By 1915, America could boast 42 princesses, 17 duchesses, and 136 countesses.
- Another way that would-be American aristocrats sought to beef up their credentials was through genealogy.
  - Those who were born into the working or middle class and acquired their fortunes later sought to find a respectable family lineage, such as an uncle who had served under George Washington or some long-lost ancestor who had arrived on the *Mayflower*.
  - As a consequence, Gilded Age elites founded and funded numerous genealogical societies, many of which still exist today.
- Gilded Age elites also founded exclusive clubs. In New York City, the most prestigious were the Union, Calumet, Racquet, and Knickerbocker clubs. For women, organizations included the Colony Club and Cosmopolitan Club. These clubs provided

opportunities for socializing, as well as opportunities to build networks and gain access to business and political power.

- One of the lesser known legacies of the Gilded Age is the custom of tipping, brought back by wealthy Americans from their grand tours of Europe.
  - In the decades that followed the American Revolution, Americans consciously eliminated any practices that smacked of European aristocracy and rigid class lines, such as the custom of bowing or wearing a powdered wig. All American white men, although not economically equal, were absolute equals as citizens of the republic.
  - However, one of the practices noticed by Gilded Age Americans on the grand tour was the custom of tipping. This might be seen as a voluntary act of generosity, but a more cynical view is that it is a way of highlighting the economic and social distance between two people. It allowed the wealthy to reward—or withhold rewards to—the “hired help.”
  - The efforts of the Gilded Age elite to bring tipping to the United States sparked considerable resistance. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was common to read newspaper editorials criticizing the “tipping evil.” Several formal organizations emerged to stamp out this un-American practice, including the Anti-Tipping Society of America and the Society for the Prevention of Useless Giving.
- The wealthy of the Gilded Age even developed their own disease: gout. Actually, gout had a long history and was known as the “disease of kings” in Europe because it was associated with a rich diet that only the elite could afford. Gout was fairly rare in the United States before the Gilded Age, but it became quite common among the nation’s wealthy.

## Social Criticism of Wealth

- One of the most interesting critiques of Gilded Age aristocrats came from one of their own: Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt grew up in an old-money family and attended Harvard; he was friends with many people who belonged to both old- and new-money families. But Roosevelt embodied much more of the old Puritan and republican virtue traditions than did his privileged contemporaries. He extolled the virtues of the outdoor life and hard work, and he believed in risking everything in pursuit of righteous military glory.
  - One of the great fears of Roosevelt and his wife was that their children would become involved with the playboy set or, worse, marry into it. Roosevelt viewed a life of parties, champagne, croquet, and European tours in the same way Americans of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century did—as effeminate, unmanly, immoral, un-republican, and un-American.
  - This concern played a role in a famous speech, in which he called on Americans to embrace the “strenuous life.”
- Some who shared Roosevelt’s negative view of the lifestyles of the rich and famous expressed other concerns. Many workers and labor activists, for example, pointed to the opulent lives of the rich as evidence that the cherished American system of equal opportunity had been corrupted. While they were stuck in low-paying jobs and forced to live in tenements, the rich lived lives of unimaginable luxury—luxury, they believed, that derived from the wealthy’s exploitation of the working class.
- Criticism also emanated from other quarters. For example, the editor of *The New York Sun* chastised the Vanderbilts for their lavish 1883 ball. He compared it to the “extravagant pageants” long used by “the royalty and nobility of the Old World for the purpose of enslaving or captivating the masses.”
  - An even greater revulsion surfaced 14 years later, in 1897, in response to the most extravagant ball to date: a \$400,000 event hosted by the Bradley Martin family, at which guests dressed in costumes depicting European royalty.

- At the time of the ball, the nation had been suffering through more than three years of severe economic depression. Consequently, vehement criticism of the event poured in from all quarters, including public officials, workers, and clergymen.
- So great was the outcry that the hosts fled to Europe and settled permanently in England. This incident effectively ended the days of high-society balls. More significantly, it highlighted the emergence of a growing number of reformers who would, in the coming years, promote such measures as the income tax and greater regulation of banks and corporations—measures intended to curb the power of the wealthy.

### Suggested Reading

Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis*.

Beebe, *The Big Spenders*.

King, *A Season of Splendor*.

### Questions to Consider

1. How did Americans view luxury and extravagant displays of wealth before 1870?
2. How did the super-rich try to distinguish themselves from ordinary Americans?
3. What groups and individuals emerged to criticize the behavior of the super-rich as a threat to the social, political, and moral underpinnings of the republic?

# Populist Revolt: The Grangers and Coxey

## Lecture 14

**O**n Easter Sunday 1894, Jacob Coxey set out from his hometown of Massillon, Ohio, to Washington, D.C. Joining him were about 100 other men. Coxey's Army—as they came to be called—eventually numbered 500 and earned the distinction of being the first major protest march in American history. In response to a severe economic depression, Coxey advocated for the federal government to abandon its traditional commitment to laissez-fair economics and create public works projects to alleviate mass unemployment. Although Coxey did not get what he came for in Washington, the larger movement to which he belonged—the Populist movement—achieved notable successes. In this lecture, we'll examine the emergence of the Populist movement during the late 1880s.

### Crisis in American Farming

- After the Civil War, tens of thousands of people had headed west to take advantage of the Homestead Act and other opportunities to acquire land for farming. While some succeeded, many others faced a series of difficulties.
- Of course, farmers faced some of the same problems that had existed since the beginning of agriculture, including unpredictable weather and pests. But even when they enjoyed good weather and bountiful harvests, there was no guarantee that farmers would earn an adequate profit.
  - Prices paid for crops fluctuated wildly from year to year in response to changes in supply and demand. As a result, a bumper crop of wheat or corn often meant a glutted market and low prices.
  - Another problem was growing international competition. In the 1880s, wheat farmers on the Great Plains saw prices fall as a result of competition with less expensive wheat grown in South America and Australia.

- Nearly all farmers in this period and since carried a great deal of debt. They borrowed money to buy land, to finance the purchase of equipment, or to get by during years of poor harvests. In most cases, farmers put up their farms as collateral to secure loans. As a result, when hard times hit, they faced the threat of foreclosure.

### **Farmer Activism**

- The first effort to ease the plight of the American farmer came in 1867, when Oliver Kelley founded the Grange, or Patrons of Husbandry. Initially, Kelley promoted the Grange as a social and educational organization, dedicated to promoting fellowship and fraternity among isolated farmers. By the early 1870s, the organization had several hundred chapters across the nation.
- The Grange experienced a dramatic transformation in the aftermath of the Panic of 1873, which triggered the worst depression in American history to that time. For farmers, it led to plummeting prices that left many unable to pay their creditors. To make matters worse, railroads charged extremely high prices to transport farm produce to market. Before long, hundreds of thousands of farmers faced ruin.
- In their desperation, farmers transformed the Grange into a powerful political movement that came to dominate Midwestern politics for the rest of the 1870s.
  - By 1874, Granger parties controlled the state legislatures of Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota and enjoyed significant influence in several more states.
  - The farmers' representatives used their power to enact a series of *Granger laws*, which were some of the earliest regulations of corporations, banks, and railroads. In particular, farmers argued that the high rates charged by railroads to transport and store agricultural commodities were made possible because railroads operated like monopolies and their fares represented extortion.
  - The Granger laws set maximum rates for transporting or storing grain and banned the practice of offering special

rates to preferred customers. Not surprisingly, railroad officials sued, denouncing these efforts to curb their profits as unconstitutional. In two key cases (*Peik v. Chicago and North-Western Railroad* and *Munn v. Illinois*), the Supreme Court ruled that state legislatures possessed authority under the Constitution to regulate business.

- Despite these legal victories, the Grange faded as an organization, primarily because the depression of 1877 ended and farm prices rose. In addition, the mainstream Democratic and Republican parties added pro-farmer planks to their platforms that made the Granger parties seem less necessary.
- But the good times for farmers did not last. When low prices and hard times returned in the 1880s, farmer activism reappeared in the form of Farmers' Alliances. These were associations dedicated to combining the power of individual farmers (via cooperatives) against commodity buyers, who paid them inadequate prices for their goods, and railroads, which charged extortionate rates to move those goods to market.

### The Emergence of Populism

- Despite their unprecedented activism, the agrarian alliances achieved very little. Thus, by the late 1880s, alliance leaders came to believe that the only way to effectively battle the monopolies and trusts was to transform the movement into a political party. They would elect farmers or pro-farmer politicians to curb the power of banks, railroads, and brokers and save the honest American farmer from ruin.
- By the summer of 1892, the People's Party had formed—its followers would be known as *Populists*—and adopted a platform that included a series of reform proposals, all of which aimed to diminish monopoly power, strengthen democracy, and empower the government to take on new roles to ensure fairness and widespread opportunity.



- The platform was approved at a national People's Party convention that also nominated candidates for national office: Union Army veteran James B. Weaver, who would run for president, and Confederate Army veteran James G. Field, who was the party's choice for vice president. (The Democrats would nominate Grover Cleveland, and the Republicans, Benjamin Harrison.)

### **The People's Party**

- At the time, it was considered unseemly for presidential candidates to campaign. Instead, they spoke to journalists from their homes, while supporters traveled the country, giving speeches. But the People's Party candidate, Weaver, recognized that with minimal name recognition and virtually no money, he would have to break with tradition. Thus, he personally traveled the country, delivering speeches to enthusiastic crowds.
- In the end, Grover Cleveland soundly defeated Benjamin Harrison. But Weaver received more than 1 million popular votes and 22 electoral votes. Results on the local and state levels were even more impressive. Many people believed these outcomes were but the beginning of a growing wave of popular support for the People's Party. The next test would come in the midterm elections of 1894.
- Here, the Populists were aided by two developments. First came the economic crash triggered by the Panic of 1893. In its wake, thousands of businesses closed, and unemployment reached 25 percent in many places. Then came the Pullman Strike of 1894, an event that Populists hoped would draw attention to their message of economic fairness.
  - Workers at the Pullman Palace Car Company walked off the job in the spring of 1894 after company officials slashed their pay but refused to cut the rent or food prices charged to workers. This small strike went national when members of the American Railway Union announced that they would support the Pullman workers by refusing to handle any Pullman cars.

- Given the fact that Pullman cars were everywhere, this policy brought the nation's rail system to a near standstill. President Cleveland sent in the army to break the strike. The ensuing violence left more than 100 workers dead. In the end, Pullman workers lost the strike, and most of them lost their jobs.
- Populists hoped that the economic suffering brought on by the depression and the harsh actions of the federal government in repressing the Pullman Strike would boost the appeal of the People's Party at the polls in the 1894 off-year election. The party, often acting in alliance with sympathetic candidates affiliated with the major parties, won some significant victories in the election. For example, in North Carolina a coalition of the People's Party and Republican Party won control of the state government.

### The Election of 1896

- People's Party leaders hoped to build on this electoral achievement to pose a serious challenge to the major parties in 1896. Events did not play out as the Populists had hoped, but the election proved to be one of the most significant in American history.
- The Republicans chose as their presidential nominee former congressman and governor of Ohio William McKinley. The Republicans also upheld the conservative commitment to the gold standard and a high tariff.
- In opposition, People's Party activists convinced millions of Americans that free coinage of silver would both end the depression and curb the monopolies and trusts by putting more money into circulation, thus lowering the value of a dollar backed exclusively by gold.
- The free silver issue held great symbolic importance during the middle of the depression. Sensing the rising popularity of Populist ideas, the Democrats nominated a young and dynamic congressman from Nebraska named William Jennings Bryan. And delegates at

the Democratic Party convention made free silver a key plank in their party platform.

- During the election, Bryan delivered one of the most famous speeches in American history: the “Cross of Gold” speech, in which he stated that common American citizens were being crucified on a “cross of gold” forced on them by Wall Street and big business.



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**In 1896, William Jennings Bryan embarked on one of the most extraordinary campaigns in American history, traveling more than 18,000 miles and speaking to more than 3 million people.**

- The emergence of Bryan and the Democrats’ stance on the silver issue left the People’s Party facing a dilemma.
  - Most Populist activists had expected the Democrats to support the gold standard. That they didn’t left the People’s Party with a vital decision: whether to nominate a different candidate and divide support for the silver issue with the Democrats or, as was common practice among small parties in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to nominate Bryan as the Populist candidate, as well.
  - In July 1896, the People’s Party chose to nominate Bryan. For vice president, the party chose Populist leader Tom Watson of Georgia.
- Bryan’s campaign generated much enthusiasm but, ultimately, not enough votes on Election Day. McKinley, who was backed with an unprecedented amount of corporate money, won with 51 percent of the vote to Bryan’s 47 percent.

- One significant outcome of the contest was a major political realignment.
  - The Republicans, portraying themselves as the party of economic prosperity and international power, now became dominant in the Midwest and Northeast.
  - Democrats became the party of the South and West. The Democrats retained the Populist belief that the government could—and should—do more to secure the well-being of the average citizen and limit the power of big business. But given their base in the South, the Democrats also supported a states-rights philosophy that protected white supremacy.
- After 1896, the People's Party faded from the American political scene. But as we will soon see, a great many of the Populists' core ideas—the graduated income tax, the direct election of U.S. senators, the creation of a central bank (the Federal Reserve), secret balloting, and the initiative and referendum—remained popular and were eventually adopted during the coming Progressive Era.

### Suggested Reading

Alexander, *Coxey's Army*.

Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment*.

Kazin, *A Godly Hero*.

———, *The Populist Persuasion*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What were the primary grievances of people who supported the People's Party?
2. What reforms did the People's Party pledge to bring about?
3. What was the long term impact of the People's Party?

# Rough Riders and the Imperial Dream

## Lecture 15

**D**uring the 1890s, America began to look beyond its own borders. This time, rather than looking west to the frontier, it cast an eye back to the Old World. The young but quickly developing nation was about to embrace internationalism—or what some might call imperialism. In this lecture, we will examine developments that convinced many Americans in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that the United States needed to take a more aggressive role in world affairs. We will then explore specific manifestations of this new policy, in particular, the Spanish-American War and the building of the Panama Canal. Finally, we will consider how internationalism—or imperialism—has shaped the nation's history since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### American Isolationism

- As Americans, we are used to speaking of westward expansion when describing the territorial growth of the United States. But looked at from a different perspective—say, that of Native Americans or Mexicans—U.S. growth could easily be seen as a form of internationalism, even imperialism. The United States played hardball to seize, annex, and purchase large chunks of territory, including the Louisiana Territory, Florida, the Republic of Texas, and others.
- Thus, strictly speaking, the United States was hardly isolationist. Instead, Americans pursued a more narrowly defined form of isolationism that was based on two important ideas: that the nation should influence the world by example and that it should avoid entanglement in European political and military affairs.
- The notion that America should avoid entanglement in European affairs stemmed from the fear of Europeanization, which Americans associated with monarchy, aristocracy, established churches, and fixed classes. Americans believed that these entrenched,

hierarchical political arrangements encouraged endless wars among European powers.

- The American form of isolationism was also based on the idea that the nation should influence the world by example. From the 1790s to the 1890s, Americans developed the belief that theirs was a nation with a special mission: to spread the virtues of democracy and republican institutions. Nearly every American agreed, however, that the only way to accomplish this task was by example rather than by military intervention.

### Entering World Affairs

- In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a series of converging ideas began to build a case for American internationalism, if not outright imperialism. These ideas included the closing of the American frontier; the threat to U.S. security from competing European powers; the American economy's need for new markets; militarism and the "martial spirit"; racism, or the "white man's burden"; and idealism, the notion that a true republic must intervene to protect and promote liberty.
- In 1890, the head of the U.S. Census Department announced that the American frontier was closed; the nation was finally "settled" from coast to coast. Some Americans celebrated this news, while others found it disturbing.
  - To some, such as the historian Frederick Jackson Turner, the frontier experience had shaped America's unique political culture and ideals, such as individualism, entrepreneurship, democracy, and freedom. The frontier, in other words, was what turned Europeans into Americans. Did the closing of the frontier mean diminished democracy, reduced equality, weakened individualism, and the decline of the American Republic?
  - The answer from a rising group of internationalists was no. The United States simply needed to establish new frontiers by acquiring foreign territories around the globe. Doing so would ensure that future generations of Americans had the opportunity to experience the positive effects of the frontier.

- A second argument in favor of American internationalism focused on security from competing European powers. The late 19<sup>th</sup> century had seen European powers rapidly seizing colonies across Asia and Africa. This trend alarmed many Americans, who wondered whether the United States was in danger of being shut out of the global marketplace or whether national security was at risk. Initially, most Americans resisted the idea of territorial conquest, but they increasingly supported the need for a strong U.S. navy.
- Another driver in America's transition from isolationism to internationalism came from the economy's need for new markets. The country had experienced several periods of depression and recession, and many economists argued that the fundamental cause of economic booms and busts was overproduction. American factories produced more goods than the American public could consume. One solution was to find new markets abroad, either through increased trade or—following the European example—through the acquisition of foreign territories.
- Yet another idea that supported a more aggressive role in world affairs for the United States emanated from a small but influential number of Americans led by Theodore Roosevelt. They were worried that because it had been several generations since the Civil War, the average American male was growing soft and effeminate. The United States needed a war to renew its masculine vigor.
- The next argument for internationalism originated as a justification for British colonialism and was appropriated by the United States: The dark races of the world live in savagery. Therefore, the imperial powers must take up the “white man's burden” of ruling them and seeing that their natural resources were put to productive use.
- By far, the most popular argument for American internationalism was the idealistic notion that the United States had an obligation to protect and promote republican liberty through the use of military power.
  - According to this argument, the tradition of simply showcasing democracy and human rights to the world was inadequate. It

might have been appropriate when America was a small, weak republic. But now that it was an emerging world power, the nation had the moral obligation to use that power to promote democracy and human rights.

- This was a largely abstract issue until the mid-1890s when a very real example of tyranny attempting to crush democracy and human rights began to unfold in Cuba, only 90 miles off the tip of Florida.

### The Spanish-American War

- Cuba was controlled by Spain and was the last major European colony in Latin America. Since the 1860s, Cuban nationalists had been pushing for independence.
  - The nationalists staged a rebellion against Spanish colonial rule in 1868 that lasted for 10 years before being crushed. Seventeen years later, in 1895, they launched a second rebellion, relying primarily on guerilla tactics.
  - The Spanish responded with harsh policies, the most notorious of which was the establishment of “re-concentration camps,” into which great numbers of Cuban civilians were herded to separate them from the rebels. A lack of adequate food and sanitation caused the deaths of tens of thousands of these Cuban civilians.
- President William McKinley’s administration pressured the Spanish to end human rights violations, but these efforts were largely ineffective. Then, on February 15, 1898, the U.S. battleship *Maine* exploded in Havana harbor, killing 260 American sailors. The explosion was likely a boiler accident, but the American public became convinced that it had been the result of Spanish treachery.
- On April 11, after a few weeks of diplomatic pressure on the Spanish, McKinley requested from Congress the authority to use force in Cuba. Two weeks later, on April 25, 1898, Congress declared war on Spain.



- The Spanish-American War was the shortest and most one-sided conflict in U.S. history. Hundreds of thousands of American men volunteered for military service, including Theodore Roosevelt, who raised his own regiment and participated in the invasion of Cuba.



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**Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders gained international fame at the battle of San Juan on July 1, 1898.**

- But even before that offensive took place, the United States scored a major victory halfway around the world, in the Philippines.
  - This Spanish colony—a vast collection of islands in the Pacific—held great strategic value. U.S. expansionists and business interests were eager to gain access to the lucrative markets of Asia. And the U.S. Navy saw the Philippines as a valuable refueling station for its Pacific fleet.
  - As a result, only a week after America declared war against Spain related to their competing interests in Cuba, Commodore George Dewey led the Pacific fleet into Manila Bay and quickly destroyed an overmatched Spanish fleet. U.S. troops landed soon thereafter to secure American possession of the islands.
- Two months later, the American army began its assault on Cuba. The first troops landed on June 22 and managed to defeat Spanish forces in a matter of weeks. On August 12, 1898, both sides signed a ceasefire, ending all hostilities. In the treaty that followed, the

United States acquired control of Cuba, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam.

- Suddenly, the young republic had become an imperial power. But the United States soon discovered that imperialism was a complicated business. For example, didn't republican principles dictate that America should grant independence to the people of the former Spanish colonies? Ultimately, a desire to retain strategic territories and control their resources led the U.S. government to deny full independence and democratic freedoms to the Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Filipinos.

### **Building the Panama Canal**

- The first attempt to cut a canal across the Isthmus of Panama to connect the Atlantic and Pacific—in what then was part of the country of Colombia—was undertaken by the French. It failed in 1888, after nine years of work. Thirteen years later, soon after being sworn in as president, Theodore Roosevelt declared his intention to complete the canal.
- But when members of Roosevelt's administration began negotiations with Colombia regarding financial compensation, things got sticky. The administration offered \$40 million for the right to build and operate the canal, plus a \$250,000 annual fee. But the Colombian congress rebuffed the deal, arguing that the price was far too low given the value of the asset. Roosevelt grew furious and denounced the Colombians as extortionists.
- Behind the scenes, the Roosevelt administration encouraged the Panamanians to declare their independence from Colombia, offering promises of U.S. military assistance. The scheme worked perfectly. On November 4, 1903, the Panamanians declared independence. When the Colombian government tried to send troops to suppress the movement, the U.S. Navy prevented the ship from landing.
- Two days later, the United States recognized Panamanian independence. And 12 days after that, the two governments signed

a treaty allowing the United States to build a canal for \$10 million, plus an annual fee of \$250,000. Construction soon resumed, and in August 1915, the canal opened for business.

- With the precedent of interventionism established in Cuba and Colombia, America left behind forever the idea of influencing world affairs by merely setting a good example. It would now embrace interventionism as a central aspect of U.S. foreign policy. Isolationism would never go away completely, but from 1898 to the present, the country has viewed itself as an international power.

### Suggested Reading

Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt*.

McCullough, *The Path between the Seas*.

Musicant, *Empire by Default*.

O'Toole, *The Spanish War*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Why did the United States adhere to a policy of isolationism before 1890?
2. What factors in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century led to the increased popularity of internationalism and/or imperialism?
3. How did advocates of internationalism justify it in terms of American values?

# No More Corsets: The New Woman

## Lecture 16

In this lecture, we'll look at the lasting ways in which the lives of American women changed during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. We will begin by revisiting women's traditional roles in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century—the Victorian era. We will then examine several key developments that led to significant changes for American women, both in terms of how they lived their lives and how they viewed themselves. We will also explore how these changes led women to take on more visible and influential roles in public life, especially in the realm of reforms. Finally, we will consider how these changes affected the women's rights movement.

### The Cult of True Womanhood

- The changes in work, values, and habits brought about by the Industrial Revolution had a major impact on gender roles and family life. As more and more families lived in cities and suburbs, rather than in rural areas, and as more men worked in factories or offices, rather than on the family farm, American society felt the need to make sense of these changes.
- If men and women no longer labored side by side and if many of the necessities women once produced on the farm—clothing, preserved food, and so on—were now made in factories and purchased in stores, what were the proper roles and responsibilities of women? The answer that emerged in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century was a set of ideals that historians term the *cult of true womanhood*.
- The beliefs associated with the cult of true womanhood emerged from many sources, including preachers, politicians, newspaper and magazine editors, and a growing number of female writers and commentators. The true woman, according to these people, embodied four virtues:

- Piety. Women, the thinking went, were naturally spiritual, and they needed to cultivate that trait. They also needed to pass it on to their children and use it to keep their husbands on the straight and narrow. In some ways, piety stood in contrast to rational thought, which was believed to be the strength of men.
- Purity. A true woman also had to be a pure woman. That is, she had to remain chaste until marriage, and after marriage, she should present herself as not particularly interested in sex, except as a means for having children.
- Submissiveness. True women must submit to the authority and opinions of men. A wife might express her views on a matter, but her husband had the final say. Assertive women caused turmoil and threatened domestic tranquility.
- Domesticity. The true woman devoted herself to making her home clean, comfortable, peaceful, moral, and healthy.
- In these virtues, we can see an important constraining element of the true woman ideal: It did not limit the range of options for women by ridiculing or denouncing them; rather, it did so by exalting them, by proclaiming their extraordinary virtues and their importance for maintaining the vitality of Christian society and the republic.
- If the proper sphere for women was domestic, the man's place was in the outside world of business and politics. This was a world of corruption, dishonesty, immorality, and violence that threatened virtuous womanhood. A true woman avoided this sphere as much as possible and devoted her energies to soothing her husband's nerves and building up his moral fiber.

### **Changing Roles for Women**

- Despite the powerful social expectations of the cult of true womanhood, several trends in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century led directly to new, more public roles for middle-class women.

- First, men and women began to delay marriage, which meant that women had more years for school or work.
- Second, once they did marry, middle-class women had fewer children.
- Third, Americans began to hire domestic servants to perform such duties as cooking, cleaning, and doing the laundry. This freed middle-class women from many time-consuming domestic responsibilities.
- Fourth, middle-class American women experienced a significant rise in education, especially at the college level.



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The Gibson Girl, created by Charles Dana Gibson, embodied the New Woman of the 1890s—feminine but more independent than women of the past.

- By 1890, women constituted 36 percent of college students, up from just 21 percent in 1870. By 1920, they made up nearly half of all college students.
- The impact of rising educational attainment meant that more American women temporarily left the domestic sphere to interact with others. In doing so, they encountered emerging ideas of women's rights, which prompted some of them to challenge the limitations society placed on them.
- Fifth, increasing numbers of women entered the workforce. Whereas just 13 percent of American women worked outside the home in 1870, 20 percent did so by 1900.
  - Nearly all of these working women were single and younger than 25 years of age. They often labored in factories or worked as domestic servants. But new fields also were opening up. For example, the number of women employed in offices soared from 19,000 in 1870 to 503,000 in 1900. The number of saleswomen rose from 7,500 in 1880 to 142,000 in 1900.
  - For middle-class women, two occupations predominated: nursing and teaching. Each of these professions traditionally had been the province of men, but over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they were gradually feminized, in part because they were associated with feminine and maternal qualities.
  - The migration of middle-class women into jobs did not cause alarm because—as with education—it was expected that they would leave the workforce upon marrying or with the birth of their first child.
- The new roles and expectations embraced by middle-class women led to much public discussion in the 1890s of the so-called New Woman. Her rising levels of education, economic independence, political and social activism, and later marriage (and fewer children) meant that she lived a life quite different from that of her Victorian mother.

## Rising Visibility and Reforms

- The late 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed an explosion in the number of women's clubs dedicated to females' intellectual improvement and social reform. Many clubs focused primarily on education, meeting regularly to discuss literature, history, and art. Others took up social reforms, causes ranging from improving public education and banning child labor to beautifying public spaces in cities and establishing public libraries.
- The largest and best-known organization was the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). Founded in 1874, it originally concentrated on encouraging individuals to give up drinking alcohol. By the 1880s, the WCTU had shifted its focus toward legal prohibition of alcohol. And by 1892, its range of interests had expanded to include education, prison reform, the prohibition of child labor, and the suppression of prostitution and pornography.
- Reform campaigns by the WCTU and other women's organizations had two important effects for the women involved.
  - First, activism as "club women" gave them the opportunity to build leadership skills and to develop networks of activist, reform-minded women.
  - Second, activism pulled women into politics even before they had the right to vote. After all, each reform they pursued required supporting legislation.
- Over time, many activist women grew frustrated with their apparent inability to influence politicians. Not surprisingly, they increasingly focused their attentions on the movement to gain real political power by obtaining the vote.

## The Women's Rights Movement

- The first women's rights convention took place at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. In 1869, the women's rights movement that had



begun there split into rival factions, the National Woman Suffrage Association and the American Woman Suffrage Association.

- Both organizations pushed for voting rights, but they differed on other issues, such as reforming divorce laws. Essentially, the National Woman Suffrage Association was more radical.
- But in 1890, after decades in which women's rights advocates could point to little positive change, the two organizations united to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Its primary goal was to secure voting rights for women.
- That same year, Wyoming was admitted to the union as the first state to allow voting by women. Three years later, Colorado approved women's suffrage, in part through NAWSA's activism. In 1896, Utah and Idaho did so, as well.
- It seemed to many women that history was on their side and that suffrage would soon be the law of the land. But the movement stalled. Controversy also buffeted the movement, stemming from tension between its liberal and conservative wings.
- It's important to remember that suffrage itself was extremely controversial. Opponents argued that it would violate the neatly ordered world of separate spheres for men and women. Women were essentially emotional creatures, unequipped mentally to responsibly exercise the right to vote. And if women entered the men's sphere to engage in political activity, they would be turning their attention away from the home and their families. As a consequence, the family would suffer.

### **Gaining the Vote**

- Given this standoff between pro- and anti-suffrage forces, how did women ultimately gain the right to vote? Historians cite three primary explanations: (1) Although women's suffrage was controversial, it gained increasing support during the 1890s and into the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; (2) the movement adopted

increasingly radical tactics; and (3) World War I broke out in Europe.

- The first significant pro-suffrage parade took place in New York City in 1910. Three years later, separatists staged a massive march in Washington, D.C., that coincided with Woodrow Wilson's arrival, the day before he was to be inaugurated as president. The size of this parade and its strategic timing drew enormous attention.
- When the suffrage movement stalled after 1915, a number of activists decided that even more radical tactics were necessary. On January 11, 1917, women and their supporters picketed outside the White House to put pressure on President Wilson to back a suffrage amendment. The protest went on for months.
- Eventually, the president ordered the picketers arrested. This proved to be a public relations disaster; word got out that some of the women were beaten by the police. Then, some of the suffragists staged a hunger strike. News of their violent force-feeding by prison officials shocked the public and embarrassed the Wilson administration. Still, Wilson maintained his opposition to suffrage.
- One year after the picketing began, Wilson finally came out in favor of a women's voting amendment. His main reason for doing so was to bolster support for the war effort. He believed that supporting women's suffrage would attract and retain the support of women for his administration and its conduct of the war. It took almost three years, but on August 26, 1920, the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was ratified. Two and a half months later, millions of American women voted for the first time.

### Suggested Reading

Harper, *How Women Got the Vote*.

Matthews, *The Rise of the New Woman*.

Walton, *A Woman's Crusade*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What trends in the 19<sup>th</sup> century transformed the lives and roles of American women?
2. Who was the New Woman?
3. How did American women achieve the right to vote?

# Trust-Busting in the Progressive Era

## Lecture 17

In November of 1902, John D. Rockefeller enjoyed the status of being one of the most powerful men in the world, whose Standard Oil Company had been deemed a “good trust” by President Theodore Roosevelt. But then, the reform-oriented magazine *McClure's* ran the first in a series of articles by Ida Tarbell on the underhanded and often illegal tactics employed by Rockefeller to build his oil empire. The popularity of Tarbell's work signaled the passing of the Gilded Age and the dawning of the Progressive Era, when major reforms would be undertaken. Rockefeller and others would soon be subject to a Progressive Era reform effort that came to be called *trust-busting*.

### Defining *Progressivism*

- The term *Progressivism* came into popular parlance around 1910, but its origins go back to the Gilded Age. Progressivism was an international movement that emerged out of the social crises experienced in industrialized nations around the world. Reformers in this era struggled with the central problem identified by the reformer Henry George in his famous book *Progress and Poverty*: Although industrialization produced extraordinary progress, it also produced rising rates of poverty and social unrest.
- The great question that reformers posed was this: How can we preserve the dynamism, creativity, and wealth creation associated with industrial capitalism while avoiding its tendency to produce inequality and exploitation that threatened the health and future of the American Republic? Progressives provided an answer based on a profound shift in the definition of American freedom and the proper role of government.
- For all of American history leading up to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, American political culture had stated freedom primarily as a negative; that is, freedom was most often defined as freedom *from* something.

- The Founding Fathers feared power, especially the power wielded by the government and those with connections to it. Thus, in their minds, freedom meant freedom from unjust restrictions on one's opportunities for success. In most cases, this meant freedom from government meddling.
- But by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, reformers had begun to redefine freedom to include its positive aspects. That is, freedom included having certain things; this added an economic dimension to freedom.
- Underlying this new understanding of freedom were three important ideas: anti-monopolism, a sense of the common good, and increased organization and efficiency.
  - Essentially, anti-monopolism stemmed from the fear of large private entities that controlled large parts of the economy. Monopolies were deemed bad because they derived their power from their political connections and because they harmed legitimate economic producers, such as small farmers and merchants.
  - Throughout American history, two ideals, individualism and the common good, had struggled for supremacy. These ideals are not fundamentally opposed to each other, but they often collide in practice. Individualism reigned supreme during the Gilded Age, but Progressives asserted that extreme individualism diminished the common good. Millions of American workers lived in poverty because a small number of big businessmen were allowed to run their empires without regard for the well-being of the community.
  - Finally, Progressives believed in science, expertise, and professionalism. They saw these endeavors as essential tools for creating rational social order. As part of their efforts to eradicate poverty, for example, Progressives believed that it was essential to compile detailed studies of poverty to determine the extent and causes of the problem.

- The expanded definition of freedom—and the emphasis on anti-monopolism, the common good, and efficiency—raised an important question: How was this conception of freedom to be implemented? The answer was simple yet profoundly radical: The government would do it. Whereas in the early days of the American Republic the Founding Fathers feared government as a threat to freedom, Progressive era reformers turned to the state as the only entity powerful enough to protect American freedom from giant corporations.

### **Crisis of Capitalism**

- By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Americans had grown concerned about the rise of large and powerful corporations, many of which were trusts. As mentioned earlier, trusts were legally binding arrangements that brought many companies in the same industry together under the direction of a single board of trustees.
- For most Americans, the fundamental problem with trusts was that they wielded enormous power. Further, this power existed beyond the reach of normal political institutions and the system of checks and balances. A would-be political tyrant could always be thwarted by separate branches of the government and thrown out of office in an upcoming election, but there was no system in place to thwart the ambitions of such men as John D. Rockefeller.

### **Reining in the Trusts**

- Two goals of Progressive reforms were to gain control of the economy in the name of the people (the common good) and to lessen the power of trusts and monopolies.
- The earliest attempt at taming the trusts came in 1890, with the passage of the Sherman Antitrust Act. Its backers intended it to render illegal the practices of large corporations to stymie competition—what the law called “restraint of trade.” But big business managed to lobby Congress so successfully that the final version of the bill was weak and vague; it was more often used to prosecute labor unions than corporations and trusts.

- After William McKinley won reelection to the presidency in 1900, Progressives saw little hope for any meaningful efforts to control the trusts. But an assassin killed McKinley in 1901, putting Theodore Roosevelt in the White House.
- When Roosevelt was sworn into office in late 1901, he took action aimed at restoring opportunity, calling his program the Square Deal. Among Roosevelt's first initiatives was to take on the Northern Securities trust. This giant conglomerate controlled three huge railroads that dominated traffic from the Great Lakes to the Pacific.
  - On February 19, 1902, the U.S. Department of Justice announced that it was filing an antitrust suit against the Northern Securities Company for violating the Sherman Antitrust Act's provisions regarding restraint of trade.
  - In 1904, the Supreme Court ruled that the Northern Securities trust must be dismantled. This was the first successful federal prosecution of a large interstate corporation.
- Next, Roosevelt took aim at the notorious meatpacking industry. Just six companies controlled half the national market and earned profits of \$700 million a year. When the Department of Justice issued injunctions against the "big six," they responded by combining into a giant trust called the National Packing Company. But in 1905, the Supreme Court ruled against the trust and ordered its dismantling.
- The next year, Roosevelt secured passage of the Hepburn Act, which greatly strengthened the Interstate Commerce Commission, empowering it to oversee the railroad industry. The act also outlawed several nefarious practices in the railroad industry that stifled competition and kept prices high.
- It's important to note that although Roosevelt took on many large trusts, he left most of them alone. He believed that there were "good trusts" and "bad trusts"; he was determined to rein in the bad ones but willing to let the good ones go about their business unmolested.

- Roosevelt's successor in 1909, President William Howard Taft, continued his mentor's program.
  - Through Taft's efforts, Rockefeller's Standard Oil trust and the American Tobacco trust were ordered dissolved in 1911. Taft also signed the Mann-Elkins Act of 1910, a law that empowered the Interstate Commerce Commission to suspend railroad rate hikes and to set rates.
  - Taft, however, reduced his antitrust efforts in the latter part of his first term, a decision that proved unpopular among Progressives, especially Roosevelt, who then challenged Taft for the Republican nomination in 1912.
- When leaders of the Republican Party conspired to deny Roosevelt the nomination, he formed the Progressive Party. The ensuing election pitted four presidential candidates against one another: Republican William Howard Taft, Democrat Woodrow Wilson, Progressive Party candidate Theodore Roosevelt, and Socialist Party candidate Eugene V. Debs. All but Taft made the trust question the centerpiece of their campaigns.
- The winner of the election, Woodrow Wilson, ultimately embraced Roosevelt's approach of regulating instead of abolishing trusts. And his administration pushed through additional important economic reforms, such as the Clayton Antitrust Act and formation of the Federal Trade Commission.

### **Banking, Consumer Protection, and Taxes**

- Efforts to reform banking stemmed from a number of concerns. First, there was the problem of instability. For all of its extraordinary production and wealth creation, the American capitalist economy had one significant flaw: periodic busts. Panics in 1837, 1857, and 1873 had wrecked the American economy and required years from which to recover.
- Second, banking reform was pushed by those concerned about the size and power of some of the largest banks. J. P. Morgan's firm,



for example, controlled—directly or indirectly—40 percent of the nation’s financial and industrial capital.

- The investigators of the congressional Pujo Committee concluded that a handful of bankers, led by J. P. Morgan himself, controlled most of the nation’s finances and a vast numbers of industries and that they manipulated the stock market.
- These and other revelations led to calls for reform. The solution was the creation of the Federal Reserve System in 1913, which established 12 regional Federal Reserve banks across the country. Private banks were required to deposit 6 percent of their assets in a Federal Reserve branch bank. The Federal Reserve, in turn, used that money to make loans to member banks, to issue paper money, and to respond to financial crises by shifting credit where it was needed.
- Another important reform involved the establishment of the income tax via the 16<sup>th</sup> Amendment.
  - Reformers pointed out that nearly all federal revenue came from tariffs on imported goods. This meant that the American public was subsidizing American manufacturers through higher prices on consumer goods, and this subsidy was paid disproportionately by working- and middle-class Americans.
  - Reformers proposed that tariffs be lowered and the revenue replaced by taxes collected on high incomes, thus shifting the burden to wealthier Americans. The 16<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution was ratified in February 1913.
- Herbert Croly, editor of the influential Progressive magazine *The New Republic*, once wrote that Progressivism amounted to employing “Hamiltonian means” of federal intervention in the economy to achieve “Jeffersonian ends” of individual freedom and self-determination. Here is where we see the fundamental ethos of Progressivism. Instead of fearing government power as a threat to liberty, Progressives believed that liberty could be preserved only by the wise use of government power.

## Suggested Reading

McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*.

Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*.

Weinberg, *Taking on the Trust*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What were trusts, and why did many Americans come to fear them?
2. What was Progressivism, and what were its core ideals?
3. How did such leaders as Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson propose to control the power of trusts?

# The 1911 Triangle Fire and Reform

## Lecture 18

One of the most disturbing trends of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was the number of bombings that targeted businesses, anti-labor advocates, and government offices associated with the suppression of labor unions. Many politicians, editors, and business leaders argued that the bombings were proof that the labor movement was a front for violent revolutionaries. They called for a harder stance by the courts against unions. Reformers, however, took a different view. They believed that the United States needed to find some way to address the demands of labor in order to defuse labor-capital tensions. This sentiment led to significant labor reforms during the Progressive Era. In this lecture, we'll look at both labor reform and consumer protection.

### Protecting American Consumers

- The ultimate success of the movement to protect American consumers from fraudulent and harmful products in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was due in large measure to one significant factor: The United States had become a thoroughly consumerist society.
- Implicit in the relationship between producer and consumer was trust. Unlike in earlier and simpler times, producers and consumers no longer knew each other. That was acceptable as long as the producer upheld its end of the bargain by producing quality goods. But in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, investigations into the food and drug industries produced astonishing revelations that shattered that trust.
- The first major revelations focused on the drug and home-remedy industry. Completely unregulated, the industry produced thousands of potions, pills, elixirs, compounds, liniments, and creams that claimed to heal everything from rheumatism to venereal disease.
  - The first significant exposé of the quack medicine trade appeared in the *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1905. It revealed the

fraudulent claims of many best-selling remedies, including Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound.

- Months later, a more substantial series of articles about patent medicines appeared in the muckraking journal *Colliers*. "The Great American Fraud"—as the series was called—exposed the fact that many remedies contained useless or harmful ingredients. Many also contained significant amounts of alcohol and opiates.
- While Americans digested the facts about patent medicines, another scandal broke, this time, in the meat industry. The meatpacking trade was already highly unpopular for charging high prices and for its recent attempt to form a giant trust. Then came perhaps the most famous muckraking exposé of the period, Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle*.
  - Published in 1906, *The Jungle* told the grim tale of a family of Lithuanian immigrants and their struggle for survival in Chicago's meatpacking district. The work is filled with incident after incident in which the family was exploited, cheated, injured, and finally, discarded by a cruel economic system.
  - Sinclair was a socialist, and he wanted the novel to inspire Americans to renounce capitalism and turn to socialism. But most readers paid little heed to that message. Instead, they focused on Sinclair's vivid descriptions of the horrid things the meatpackers put into their products—diseased cattle, poisonous dyes, rats and rat poison, sawdust, and the occasional unlucky worker's body.
  - President Theodore Roosevelt met with Sinclair, then dispatched his own team of investigators to Chicago. Before long, pressure mounted in Congress to pass legislation that would address the scandal.
- These revelations about the meat industry caused many Americans to question the virtues of laissez-faire economic policy. In addition,

many business leaders began to see the virtues of at least some federal regulation. Rules and supervisory oversight could bring order and stability to industry and eliminate badly behaved producers.

- Thus, when the Meat Inspection Act came before Congress in 1906, the major meatpackers used their influence to diminish the power of the law but not to block it. Soon after the legislation was passed, Congress also passed the Pure Food and Drug Act. This companion law outlawed interstate transit of adulterated or harmful products and required that companies list the ingredients on their product labels.
- Theodore Roosevelt signed both measures into law on the same day. In the name of upholding the common good, manufacturers would now have to submit to government oversight.

### **Trade Unionism**

- In 1900, hundreds of thousands of Americans labored in manufacturing, mining, and transportation. Because the vast majority were not members of any union, they possessed little leverage when it came to negotiating wages, hours, and conditions.
  - In addition to working long hours for low wages, their work increasingly consisted of monotonous tasks. Advances in industrial technology had steadily decreased the amount of skill required to work on a factory line. As a result, many workers found themselves pulling the same lever or installing the same screw for 10 to 14 hours a day. Such work was not merely mind-numbing but also dangerous because it made workers prone to mistakes.
  - Another grievance during this period concerned the workers' diminished voice in the workplace and the increasingly authoritarian style of their foremen and bosses. To many workers, this trend seemed completely at odds with notions of American democracy.

- Finally, the typical worker faced the intense hostility of employers to unions. Even the suspicion of union activity could get a worker fired. And if employees went on strike, employers were under no obligation to negotiate, nor were they barred from simply hiring replacements.
- In response to these grievances, many workers turned to the labor movement, which was divided into several segments. The most established organization was the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Founded in 1886, it had 1.6 million members in 1904, making it the largest labor organization in the nation. The AFL pursued a fairly conservative agenda. Its members supported industrial capitalism and claimed that they merely wanted a fair share of the profits they generated.
- Another significant option for workers during the Progressive Era was socialism. Socialists had been active in the United States since the 1870s, but they began to enjoy unprecedented influence during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.
  - Several leading socialists, including Eugene Debs, founded the Socialist Party in 1901. They adopted a loose definition of *socialism* and attracted many self-styled “socialists” who rejected the Marxist idea of class struggle. This open-armed



**The American Federation of Labor pursued what its leader, Samuel Gompers, called a “pure and simple” agenda of high wages, shorter hours, workplace safety, and job security.**

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approach helped the Socialist Party to grow to 150,000 dues-paying members by 1912.

- The main reason for the Socialist Party's appeal was the perceived corruption and ineffectiveness of both the Democratic and Republican parties. In contrast, the Socialist Party offered a detailed and concrete program of reforms that included equalization of the tax burden, municipal takeover of utilities and mass transit, inspection of factories and housing, construction of schools and parks, and more.
- A third organization workers turned to was a radical offshoot of the Socialist Party, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Founded in 1905, the IWW preached *syndicalism*, a form of socialism in which workers would take over all factories and means of production and run them as cooperative enterprises.
- While socialists, syndicalists, and trade unionists struggled to achieve a better life for American workers, several extraordinary events helped to gain the attention of political leaders, including the Triangle shirtwaist factory fire and the Bread and Roses strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts.
  - The Triangle shirtwaist factory fire, in which 146 people were killed, sparked outrage across the nation, particularly when details of exploitation in the garment industry came to light. Within three years of the disaster, an exhaustive investigation of New York factories led to the passage of 36 laws related to factory safety and labor hours. Many of these new laws were copied by other states.
  - The Bread and Roses strike began when textile workers walked off the job in response to a pay reduction imposed in conjunction with a new law requiring employers to reduce the workweek from 56 to 54 hours. The textile manufacturers refused to budge, and a long, tense standoff ensued. Finally, the workers arranged a "children's exodus" from Lawrence to New York City that garnered public sympathy for the strike.

Ultimately, Congress convened hearings about the strike, and the will of the mill owners began to crumble. On March 12, 1912, the strike ended with a stunning victory by the workers.

### Labor Reforms

- Some labor reforms came at the federal level. The key figure here was President Theodore Roosevelt. When thousands of members of the United Mine Workers (UMW) went on strike in 1902, Roosevelt personally intervened.
  - Roosevelt invited the mine owners and union leader John Mitchell to the White House. Both sides initially held firm. But in the ensuing weeks, Roosevelt maintained contact with both sides and pressured them to agree to the recommendations of a special commission that he intended to form. Mitchell agreed after Roosevelt promised the union leader that he could name several members to the commission.
  - It took a little longer to bring the mine owners around, but growing public animosity toward them and pressure from the Roosevelt administration ultimately persuaded them also to agree to abide by the commission's findings. On October 23, 1902, Roosevelt announced that the strike was over.
  - Three months later—after testimony from 558 witnesses (including hundreds of miners)—the commission rendered a decision that most viewed as a UMW victory. Mitchell and the UMW were awarded a 10 percent pay raise and a nine-hour work day. The mine owners managed a symbolic victory in that they were not required to recognize the UMW.
  - Both sides agreed to settle future disputes by submitting to an arbitration board. This helped establish the precedent that the federal government should not reflexively side with capital in labor disputes but, instead, should intervene as a neutral party on behalf of the public interest. In the years that followed, the real action occurred at the state level.



- Responding to rising public sympathy for labor and the public's fear of social upheaval, lawmakers began passing foundational reforms. For example, 38 states passed laws outlawing child labor by 1912. By 1912, 24 states had also established the eight-hour workday for public employees. Even more states passed laws establishing worker's compensation programs, and many states passed laws to improve workplace safety.
- These Progressive Era reforms may look minimal in comparison to the major reforms enacted in the New Deal and beyond. But they represented an important step in the process of resolving what Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis called the serious problem of the contradiction between “political liberty” and “industrial slavery.”

### Suggested Reading

Goodwin, *The Pure Food, Drink, and Drug Crusaders, 1879–1914*.

Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs*.

Von Drehle, *Triangle*.

### Questions to Consider

1. How did rising fear that American workers were becoming radicalized convince some political leaders to embrace labor reform efforts?
2. What were the most significant pro-labor laws passed during the Progressive Era?
3. What led to the movement to regulate the quality of food and medicine in the Progressive Era?

# Theodore Roosevelt, Conservationist

## Lecture 19

In this lecture, we take up one of the vital movements associated with the Progressive Era: conservation, or what we now sometimes refer to as environmentalism. Even though much of what we think about the Progressive Era concerns cities, factories, and railroads—as well as Congress and the courts—the effort to preserve and protect America’s natural wonders and wildlife drew on all the classic Progressive goals and ideals. Roosevelt, as we shall see, made conservation the cornerstone of his two terms in office. Although he believed in capitalism, private property, and commercial development, Roosevelt also argued that public officials needed to use their power and foresight to preserve large sections of nature for future generations of Americans.

### Pre-Progressive Conservation

- From the 17<sup>th</sup> to the early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, most Americans believed that the wilderness was both a terrifying place and a place of opportunity, filled with inexhaustible resources. By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as the American population pushed westward and the army forced Native Americans onto reservations, Americans began to set aside the notion that the wilderness was something to be afraid of. Instead, they began to focus on the idea of the wilderness as a place of inexhaustible resources.
- In 1850, the population of the United States was 23 million. By comparison, in Europe—a landmass only slightly larger—the population was more than 200 million. Few Americans could imagine a time when land, forests, minerals, and water would become scarce. For many, the astonishing abundance of North America seemed to confirm the popular notion of Manifest Destiny: that God favored the United States and intended for it to become a great nation that would spread republican ideals around the world.

- These notions were affirmed by mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century advocates of westward settlement, who generated endless tracts and guidebooks extolling the virtues of the West as a place of limitless resources and opportunity. And at least some of these writers eagerly anticipated a time when the wilderness of the United States would be replaced by farms and commerce.
- At the same time, other Americans contended that nature and the wilderness were essential alternatives to modern industrial society. Nature, in other words, was the antithesis of the city, the factory, the telegraph, and the railroad. The latter were good things, but they assaulted one's senses and harmed one's health. In order to live a decent life, people needed access to the restorative qualities of nature.
- These two schools of thought about the purpose of nature would compete for supremacy in the American mind from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century down to present day: first, that nature is an inexhaustible resource for humanity's progress and advancement, and second, that nature is the antithesis of the modern age and a needed refuge from it.

## **Origins of the Conservation Movement**

- Like many movements, conservation was inspired by high ideals—and negative examples. For example, Niagara Falls was famous as a wonder of nature. But the advent of railroads during the 1830s had made it easier to reach the falls, and the surrounding area became an ugly tourist trap. Thus, when early conservationists began to identify new wonders of nature in the American West, they were determined to prevent any of them from becoming “another Niagara Falls.”
- The first conservationist initiative to succeed occurred in California.
  - Beginning in the 1850s, as the Euro-American population had soared following the Gold Rush, Americans back east learned of the state's natural wonders, especially those in Yosemite. In particular, Americans were taken with the descriptions of the giant Sequoia trees.



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**Yellowstone, established as a national park in 1872, was the first national park in the world.**

- Conservationists who were committed to protecting Yosemite turned to Congress. In 1864, California Senator John Conness introduced a bill to grant to California a vast tract of federal land in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, including Yosemite and the giant Sequoia forest. The law passed and was signed by Lincoln in June 1864.
- A few years later, a similar effort preserved Yellowstone. There, advocates of conservation faced opposition from commercial interests, especially railroads that wanted to run lines through Yellowstone and to build huge hotels for all the tourists they intended to bring there. Nonetheless, Congress established Yellowstone as a national park in 1872.
- In coming years, conservationists gained more popular support. In part, this was the result of the rising popularity of outdoor recreation. Such organizations as the Appalachian Mountain Club and the Boone and Crockett Club brought outdoor-loving people

together to map the wilderness, cut and maintain trails, and build lodges. These organizations also lobbied state governments and Congress to expand and protect wilderness areas.

- In 1890, thanks to the efforts of wilderness advocate John Muir, President William Henry Harrison signed into law the legislation that established Yosemite National Park. That same year, Congress created two other national parks in California: Sequoia National Park and General Grant National Park.

### **Theodore Roosevelt's Accomplishments**

- When Roosevelt became president in 1901, he endeavored to preserve vast sections of America's wilderness with an energy equal to that he had expended to rein in Wall Street and big business. In both cases, Roosevelt stressed a core Progressive value: the common good over individual desire.
  - It's important to note the distinction between the goals of wilderness preservationists, such as John Muir, and Progressive conservationists, such as Roosevelt.
  - Preservationists wanted to protect natural places from disruption by modern economic development, including major roads and tourist facilities. Conservationists, in contrast, believed that natural resources should be managed rather than simply preserved. It was unrealistic and unwise—Roosevelt and like-minded Progressive thinkers argued—to simply cordon off lands that were rich in both natural beauty and natural resources.
  - Progressives believed that intelligent management of forests, wildlife, and other resources would allow the United States to enjoy the best of both worlds: beautiful places preserved for future generations and commercial benefits for the present generation. Expert analysis would determine if a certain amount of logging or hunting could take place in a protected forest.

- Soon after taking up residence in the White House, Roosevelt began making changes. He appointed the like-minded conservationist Gifford Pinchot as head of the Bureau of Forestry. Then, he transferred authority over national parks, game preserves, and forest reserves to the bureau. And the two men set about making conservation history.
- Roosevelt's first significant achievement in conservation came in May 1902 with the establishment of Crater Lake National Park in Oregon. He would establish four more national parks during the course of his presidency. A month later, Roosevelt signed into law the Newlands Reclamation Act, a law that authorized federal irrigation projects.
- In March 1903, Roosevelt established Pelican Island in Florida as a wildlife reserve. He would establish 50 more wildlife reserves before his presidency concluded. Also in March 1903, he took steps to protect vast areas of Alaska.
- In February 1905, Roosevelt transformed the Bureau of Forestry into the National Forest Service and made Pinchot the head of the new agency. Over the next few years, the two men would create or enlarge 150 national forests.
- In June 1905, Roosevelt established the nation's first National Game Preserve in Wichita Forest, Oklahoma. He added three more before leaving the White House in 1909. And in December 1905, Roosevelt helped cofound the American Bison Society, dedicated to saving the nation's dwindling herds of buffalo.
- The Antiquities Act—which empowered the president to set aside and protect lands with historical, scientific, or aesthetic value—was signed by Roosevelt into law in June 1906. He would soon designate 18 sites under the act, including many endangered Native American archaeological locations. One of these was the Grand Canyon.

- On March 4, 1907—with western opposition on the rise and Congress poised to limit his authority to reserve more land—Roosevelt, in one fell swoop, created 16 million acres of national forest.
- In May 1908, the president convened a national governors conference to discuss the development of common policies for conservation. The success of the event inspired him to create the National Conservation Commission to study and recommend further policies for advancing conservation.
- Throughout all of this, representatives of the logging, ranching, and mining industries criticized Roosevelt and Pinchot. The pair also took heat from political congressmen in western states, who voiced opposition to what they perceived as meddling from Washington.
- Roosevelt's concern for the environment did not end with his presidency. Indeed, when he decided to run for president again in 1912, he made conservation a major part of his political platform. Of course, it was Woodrow Wilson who won the election of 1912, and he presided over one of the most controversial conservation-related decisions of the Progressive Era.
  - In the years following the devastating 1906 earthquake and fires that destroyed much of San Francisco, state officials looked for ways to improve the city's water supply. They ultimately hit upon the idea of damming the Hetch Hetchy Valley to create a massive reservoir. The problem was that the proposed site of the reservoir lay inside Yosemite National Park, land that was off limits to any sort of development.
  - Conservationists moved to block the project. But California state officials and business interests garnered enough support in Washington to carry out the plan. In 1913, Congress passed the Raker Act, authorizing a dam to be built on the Hetch Hetchy and for the valley below to be flooded. Wilson signed the legislation into law.

## Conservation's Enduring Legacy

- In the decades following Roosevelt's administration, the U.S. government continued to add parks to the national system. By 2014, the country had 58 national parks, which were visited by nearly 3 million people annually. State governments also got into the act; the number of state parks in the United States now tops 7,800.
- More broadly, the conservation movement—legitimized and popularized by Roosevelt—exerted a profound influence on the way Americans in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries thought about their relationship to the environment.
- By institutionalizing the idea that we need nature and wilderness for humankind's healthy development and well-being, conservationists made clear the realization that the single greatest threat to the environment was—and remains—us. We are not separate from the environment. We are a part of it, and our choices and policies matter.
- Conservation has also changed the way many Americans think about property rights, capitalism, and progress. It compels people to consider the consequences of unrestrained economic development. What might be good for the individual—or good for the community in the short term—might also prove disastrous for future generations. Conservation, in other words, urges Americans to make decisions and develop policies with the long-term view in mind.

### Suggested Reading

Brinkley, *The Wilderness Warrior*.

Duncan and Burns, *The National Parks*.

Fox, *American Conservation Movement*.



## Questions to Consider

1. What ideals and values inspired the conservation movement?
2. Who was John Muir, and what role did he play in the emerging conservation movement?
3. What were the primary accomplishments of the Roosevelt administration in the realm of conservation?

# Urban Reform: How the Other Half Lives

## Lecture 20

The United States experienced explosive urban growth during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Industrialization and mass immigration transformed large cities into major metropolises. Between 1860 and 1900, the number of cities with populations greater than 100,000 jumped from 9 to 38. This explosive growth was often chaotic and attended by significant increases in crime, violence, poverty, and outbreaks of epidemic diseases. Indeed, some argued that large cities threatened the well-being of the republic. But during the Progressive Era, others searched for ways to reform the city, to mitigate its many problems in order to derive the benefits that come from urban life.

### Progressive Reformers

- Most Americans in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century subscribed to the traditional belief that poverty was caused by personal or moral failure. All the poor needed to do was to abandon their degenerate ways and seize the opportunities for success that abounded in American life. Society, therefore, owed the poor nothing but perhaps a minimal level of private charity. Anything more than minimal support would encourage dependence and perpetuate the problem of poverty.
- Reformers began to challenge this moralistic view in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century by arguing that factors beyond the control of the poor caused a significant portion of poverty. One of the most important proponents of this new outlook was the photojournalist Jacob Riis, an immigrant who had arrived in New York from Denmark in 1870.
  - Riis spent his first years in America struggling in poverty. He finally gained a foothold in journalism and began to write sympathetic articles about the poor in the slums of New York. Eventually, he wrote a book titled *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York*.

- At the time, there were other books that provided shocking accounts of prostitution, drunkenness, and violence in America's slums, but Riis's book was different. Instead of attributing the problems of the poor to their own moral failures, Riis argued that the poor were victims of unhealthy and unregulated tenements.



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- Riis convinced many readers that a growing number of impoverished slum dwellers were trapped in circumstances beyond their control. He called for improved tenements that would free the poor from their debilitating circumstances and allow them the chance to succeed.

***How the Other Half Lives* by Jacob Riis stands today as one of those testaments in American history—like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—that exerted a profound influence on its time.**

- Riis was not alone in promoting a more sympathetic view of poverty, nor remedies to it. Beginning in the mid-1880s, middle-class and college-educated women began establishing *settlement houses* in poor urban neighborhoods. The most famous and influential of these, Hull House, was founded in 1889 in Chicago by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr.
  - Unlike socially conscious, elite women of earlier generations—who simply raised money for the poor or lobbied state legislatures for laws against child labor—Addams and Starr (and the women workers they attracted to Hull House) consciously chose to live among the poor in order to get to know and understand them.

- Within a decade of its opening, Hull House was a flourishing institution that offered a wide array of services to the poor of Chicago. Addams and other Hull House workers prodded city authorities to improve tenement laws, increase street cleaning and garbage removal, and expand public education. And they lobbied state officials for laws against child labor and for improved factory safety.
- Hull House was not the first settlement house in America, but it soon became the most famous, inspiring the establishment of 400 other settlement houses across the nation by 1910.
- This period also saw the emergence of a new profession—the social worker—concerned with issues similar to those addressed by settlement house activists. Unlike settlement house workers, who tended to focus on the problems of the community, social workers focused on the individual. They visited individuals and families on a regular basis, collected information, and devised plans to help people address the problems that were the source of their poverty or poor health.

### **Moral Reform**

- Moral reformers took yet another approach to tackling the problems of the city. These reformers were motivated, in part, by a conservative sense of morality and sinfulness and by an acute awareness of the connection between what people in polite circles called “vice” and human suffering.
- First and foremost, moral reformers conducted a crusade against alcohol. This movement began with the establishment of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in 1874. By 1911, the WCTU had chapters across the United States and boasted a membership of 250,000 people.
  - Some people joined the temperance movement because they believed that alcohol consumption was sinful. Other members were businessmen, who were concerned that alcohol hindered the productivity and reliability of their employees. Probably

most temperance activists, however, saw alcohol consumption as a habit linked to a host of other social ills, such as poverty, unemployment, and domestic abuse.

- In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the temperance movement began to gain traction as numerous states passed prohibition statutes. In 1919, the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, prohibiting the manufacture, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverages, was ratified.
- The greatest popular support for Prohibition came from Protestants living in rural and small-town America. But the target of their efforts was urban America, a frightening place they associated with foreigners, violence, and immorality.
- A second major moral reform of the Progressive Era concerned prostitution. As with the temperance movement, some people involved in this effort were motivated by traditional notions of sin. But most anti-prostitution activists saw women prostitutes primarily as victims.
  - Another motivation in the crusade against prostitution was a concern for public health; medical professionals had begun to link the spread of venereal disease to prostitution.
  - Finally, there was the hysteria surrounding the so-called white-slave trade, which led Congress to pass the Mann Act in 1910, a law that prohibited the transport of women across state lines “for the purpose of prostitution or debauchery, or for any other immoral purpose.”
  - All of this led to efforts by local officials to clamp down on prostitution. They launched campaigns to close brothels and break up red-light districts. But these solutions did little to diminish the problem. Instead of reducing prostitution, the crackdowns merely dispersed it to other sections of a city.

- Progressive Era moral reformers took on many other initiatives, as well, including efforts to regulate dance halls and movie theaters and to ban gambling and boxing.

### Forces of Urban Reform

- As mentioned earlier, Jacob Riis's book, *How the Other Half Lives*, drew national attention to the problem of tenement housing in American cities. But the campaign for tenement reform moved slowly, primarily because the buildings in question were private property. With fairly strict notions about private property rights, many Americans questioned whether the government had the right to establish or enforce housing standards.
- In New York City, which was the center of housing reform, exhaustive studies of the problem of tenements were conducted in 1894 and again in 1900.
  - As a result, in 1901, New York adopted the nation's first major housing law. It outlawed the old dumbbell style of tenement that featured tiny rooms and no running water or sanitary facilities.
  - Henceforth, windows were required in every room, as was an open courtyard in the rear to provide light and air. Tenements also had to offer running water and bathroom facilities. Similar laws were adopted in cities across the country.
- Adding to the problems of tenement life were dreadful public health conditions, starting with the filthy condition of city streets.
  - Before the dawn of the automobile age around 1910, cities relied on huge numbers of horses for transportation. And, of course, these animals produced a staggering amount of waste. One public health official in Milwaukee estimated that in 1907, the city's 12,500 horses dropped 133 tons of manure a day!
  - The problem wasn't the horses per se but, rather, the haphazard and inadequate street-cleaning practices in most cities, especially in slum districts. Street-cleaning contracts were lucrative prizes, handed out by political machine

operatives who were more interested in votes and kickbacks than clean streets.

- Another threat to public health was the inadequate disposal of human waste. Many cities had constructed hundreds of miles of sewer piping during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but poorer neighborhoods were proportionately underserved. As late as 1900, many working-class urban neighborhoods still relied on backyard privies that sat next to public water pumps. Frequent overflows of the privies led to contamination of the pumps with disease-causing bacteria.
- Unhealthy housing and sanitation fostered epidemics, physical suffering, and death in slums across America. In Chicago, 2,000 people died from typhoid fever in 1891, while more than double that number—another 4,300—died from bronchitis and pneumonia. Throughout the early 1890s, some 10,000 to 12,000 children under the age of 5 died each year in Chicago from all sorts of diseases.
- To combat these problems, Progressive Era reformers turned to their favorite weapons: data, science, organization, and expertise. They commissioned exhaustive studies of public health problems by doctors and epidemiologists. Armed with information from these studies, reformers prodded city officials to expand public health departments, enact stricter statutes governing garbage removal and sewage, and professionalize street-cleaning departments.
- Still another vital urban reform involved an increased commitment to public education. This effort reflected the traditional belief that education provided the people of a democracy with the tools needed to become productive and informed citizens.
  - In the age of mass immigration, advocates also saw expanded public schooling as a means of Americanizing the urban immigrant masses.

- Compulsory education laws—usually requiring schooling until age 14—and a massive building campaign saw the number of public school enrollments surge from 6.9 million in 1870 to 17.8 million by 1910. Millions more students attended parochial schools established by the Catholic Church. By 1920, the United States had achieved essentially universal literacy.
- Each of these urban reforms—housing, health, and education—emanated from a central Progressive Era notion: that even though these initiatives cost taxpayers money and, in some ways, impinged on individual autonomy, they had the effect of benefiting all American citizens. In other words, they promoted the common good. If the average citizen was healthier and better educated, American society as a whole would be stronger.
- Overall, the Progressive Era urban reform impulse reflected two important ideas: First, cities were important places—the centers of business, culture, learning, and the arts. Second, the problems that threatened to make cities unlivable could be solved by applying quintessential Progressive policies based on logic, data, expertise, and government authority.

### Suggested Reading

Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*.

Davis, *American Heroine*.

Okrent, *Last Call*.

Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*.



## Questions to Consider

1. What was the White City, and what vision of American urbanism did it promote?
2. What was the settlement house movement? What new understanding of poverty was it based on?
3. What were the most significant Progressive Era urban reforms?

# The 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment: Democracy Restored

## Lecture 21

On September 8, 1900, a massive hurricane hit Galveston, Texas, killing 6,000 to 12,000 people and wiping out communications and rail transportation for weeks. In the aftermath of the storm, Galveston's civic and business leaders devised a new form of urban government: the city commission. To get the city back on its feet, five commissioners were selected, not for their political connections but for their expertise in matters of business, management, and finance. In an era when city governments were notorious for corruption and inefficiency, this model gained widespread national attention, and many cities moved to adopt it. As we'll see in this lecture, the city commission was but one of many important political reforms instituted during the Progressive Era.

### Late-19<sup>th</sup>-Century Politics

- Participation in politics had reached extraordinary heights in the late 1800s. Americans turned out in extremely high numbers on Election Day, averaging about 72 percent of registered voters between 1876 and 1896. Despite such intense popular interest, however, politicians were unable to resolve the major issues that dominated the national stage.
- During this period, a closely divided electorate hampered American democracy. Each of the five presidential elections between 1876 and 1892 was decided by a razor-thin margin, and no incumbent president in this period won reelection. Only twice did one party control both houses of Congress and the presidency—and never for more than two years.
- Reformers also identified another problem with American politics: the unchecked influence of business interests on elected officials. At election time, politicians of both parties turned to the people for their votes, but during the course of governing, many believed that politicians took their cues from big business. Thus, reformers set

out to strengthen the voice of the people and weaken the power of the political parties that were beholden to big business.

### **Wide-Ranging Local Reforms**

- In 1900, nearly every large American city was dominated by a political machine. The best known, of course, was New York's Tammany Hall machine, then under the control of Richard Croker. But similar organizations existed across the country. Political machines operated on a set of straightforward rules:
  - Mobilize the masses to vote for the machine's candidates; this was accomplished by handing out jobs, favors, charity, and free beer.
  - Pay for the largesse by using elective office to orchestrate lucrative kickbacks on city contracts and protection schemes, whereby saloons, brothels, and gambling operations were allowed to flourish as long as they paid off the machine.
  - Ridicule reformers as do-gooders who did not understand politics and cared more about penny-pinching than taking care of people in need.
- The problem of entrenched and corrupt political machines was put before the American people by the famous muckraking journalist Lincoln Steffens. He wrote a series of exposés and two books about political corruption in American cities that built popular support for reform measures.
- One such reform was establishing the position of city manager. Reformers wanted to wrest control from corrupt political machines and place it in the hands of experts who would act in the interests of the people.
  - To accomplish this goal, reformers sometimes abolished the office of mayor and replaced it with a city manager who was hired by the city council. The ideal city manager was nonpartisan and brought to his work expertise in management and business principles.

- If the council—or the people who elected it—decided they didn't like their city manager, they could replace him immediately, rather than having to wait for the end of an elective term. By 1920, 45 cities had adopted this reform.
- Another often-overlooked political reform that took hold during this period was the secret ballot.
  - The typical mid- to late-19<sup>th</sup>-century ballot box was a glass globe in a metal frame with a slot at the top. Ballots for this box were printed by political parties in distinct colors. This practice allowed candidates to tell uneducated or non-English-speaking voters to simply vote the “green ticket” or the “blue ticket.”
  - But because a voter's choice could be seen clearly in the glass ballot box, the practice also allowed political enforcers to intimidate voters. Someone who deposited a gray ticket instead of a blue one might be beaten outside the polling place, or the voter's family might be cut off from assistance from the political machine.
  - Reformers argued that the secret ballot would eliminate such problems. They also called for the government to print official ballots with all candidates' names on them and to issue them only at polling sites.
  - These ideas caught on quickly, and by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, nearly every state had adopted the secret ballot.
- The rising popularity of political reform ultimately led to one of the more surprising developments of the Progressive Era: the reform of the political machine itself.
  - Until now, we've thought of political machines as corrupt, unscrupulous, and dedicated to protecting and perpetuating their own power. But by about 1910, a younger generation of political operatives could see that the machine needed to change.

- Up-and-coming political figures within Tammany Hall, such as Alfred E. Smith, convinced the machine leadership that it was no longer appropriate to attend to people's crises and tragedies after they occurred. Instead of helping a widow to pay for rent and groceries after her husband had been killed in a factory accident, shouldn't the machine use its power to force the passage of workplace safety legislation that would prevent such deaths in the first place?
- In the aftermath of the Triangle shirtwaist factory fire, Smith headed up a factory inspection commission whose investigation led to the passage of more than 30 laws within just a few years to reform labor conditions and factory operations.
- Tammany and other political machines realized that just as offering no-questions-asked-charity to those in need had once garnered loyalty and power, now, delivering social legislation achieved the same end.

### **State Political Reform**

- Two significant state-level reforms pursued by Progressives were the ballot initiative and the referendum. Both of these—first proposed by the Populists in the 1890s—were considered forms of *direct democracy*. That is, they allowed the public to make political decisions without the interference of political parties or the powerful business interests that controlled the parties.
- Once a law had been drafted by the state legislature, a referendum allowed the people of the state to vote on the measure. In a sense, a referendum allowed a state legislature to “chicken out.” That is, the legislators could draft a law, but instead of voting on it themselves—and possibly catching heat for it—they turned to the people to decide.
- By comparison, the ballot initiative was the purest form of direct democracy. It allowed people to draft a law on their own, away from the meddling of legislators and lobbyists. A certain number

of signatures had to be gathered to have the initiative placed on the ballot, but then, it was put to a people's vote.

- A third reform—the recall election—emanated from the same goal of shifting political power from the parties and the office holders to the people. The recall allowed citizens to remove someone from office for any reason, including incompetence or corruption. Of all the political reforms of this era, this one generated the most opposition, and only a handful of states adopted it.
- The direct primary was, by far, the most widely adopted political reform of the era. Before 1900, political parties selected which candidates ran for particular offices. Only men loyal to the party organization and its backers could expect to be nominated.
  - But starting in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, reformers began to popularize the idea of primary elections. Initially, primaries were adopted in local elections for such offices as school board member. Gradually, they spread to state offices and, eventually, to presidential elections. By 1915, every state used the primary system to fill some or all of its elected offices.
  - Although Progressives considered the nearly universal adoption of the primary system as one of their major success stories, it also contributed to a downward trend in voter turnout. Political scientists attribute this decline, in part, to the weakening of the major parties.

### Federal Reforms

- On the national level, Progressives pushed for the expansion of civil service, a system that requires people seeking public jobs to take a competency exam. Ideally, such a system would bring into government highly competent workers and people who owed no political figure or party any favors for securing them a job. By 1920, about 80 percent of federal employees were covered by the civil service system. Many states also adopted civil service requirements for state employees.

- Another national reform initiative was the push for greater democracy in Congress, specifically, the Senate.
  - At the time, the Senate comprised nearly 100 men, all of whom had been appointed by their state legislatures rather than elected by popular vote. This was in keeping with the language of the Constitution, which said: “The Senate of the United States shall be composed of two Senators from each state, chosen by the legislature thereof ... .” The system was intentionally undemocratic, because the Framers wanted the Senate to be immune from the shortsighted and parochial passions of the people.
  - The system worked well enough until the 1850s, when political partisanship and corruption produced turmoil. For example, between 1866 and 1906, the Senate had nine bribery cases brought before it, wherein a new senator was accused of buying off state legislators to vote him into the Senate.
  - An effort to replace this antiquated system began in 1893 when reformers put forth a constitutional amendment calling for the popular election of senators. Not surprisingly, the amendment elicited intense opposition from the Senate. Nonetheless, reformers resubmitted the amendment every year for the next decade, and pressure mounted after 1900 from muckraking journalists. In 1913, the 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution was ratified, calling for direct election of senators.
- Another significant political reform was also gathering steam by this time. Women’s rights activists had been demanding the right to vote since the 1840s. By 1912, nine states allowed women to vote, but the movement had stalled. Thus, a group of younger and more radical women’s rights activists adopted aggressive tactics to push for women’s suffrage. The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution, giving women the right to vote, was finally ratified in 1920.
- Although Progressive Era political reforms did not perfect American democracy, there is no denying that they made it more

democratic, less corrupt, and more representative of the will of the people.

### Suggested Reading

Goebel, *A Government by the People*.

Hoogenboom, *Outlawing the Spoils*.

Steffens, *The Shame of the Cities*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What were the major flaws in the American democratic system that Progressive reformers attempted to address?
2. What was direct democracy, and why did Progressive Era reformers insist that it was necessary?
3. Why did the secret ballot emerge as a significant reform in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century?



# Early Civil Rights: Washington or Du Bois?

## Lecture 22

Many Americans think of the civil rights movement as beginning in 1954 with the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which declared segregation unconstitutional, but this view of the civil rights story is incomplete. The struggle to achieve racial equality in the United States began long before 1954. In this lecture, we will look at a key chapter in that story: how African Americans fought back against racism and violence during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and how this effort laid the groundwork for more recent chapters of civil rights history in the 1950s and 1960s.

### Postwar Amendments to the Constitution

- One of the greatest challenges of Reconstruction (roughly 1865–1877) was the question of the status of the nearly 4 million former slaves who had been freed by the war. In Congress, Republicans pushed for measures to establish the full equality of African Americans. The result was ratification of the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Constitution.
- The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which became law in 1865, formally abolished slavery in the United States.
- The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which took effect in 1868, was more complicated and far-reaching. It radically redefined the role of the federal government as a guarantor of individual civil rights. Among other provisions, it declared that all persons born or naturalized in the United States were citizens, that all citizens were entitled to “equal protection of the laws” of the states where they lived, and that no adult male citizen could be denied the right to vote.
- The 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which took effect in 1870, was intended to protect black voting rights. It declared, “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the

United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

### Undermining the Amendments

- The first 5 to 10 years of Reconstruction witnessed a great expansion in the definition of American liberty and equality. African Americans—and a significant number of white southern Republicans—created an interracial democratic order that saw hundreds of blacks elected to office and millions more offered the opportunity to receive an education, to own land, and so on, despite massive resistance from former Confederates.
- But later in the 1870s, the commitment of northern Republicans to uphold and protect these rights with federal authority began to wane. This, in turn, allowed southerners to reclaim power and reestablish a white supremacist order.
- Southern white supremacists sought ways to circumvent the Reconstruction amendments without directly violating them. They accomplished this through systemic economic, social, and political oppression. For example, undermining the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment—which abolished slavery—was accomplished through the system of economic oppression known as *sharecropping*.
- Undermining the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment—which guaranteed “equal protection of the laws” to all U.S. citizens—was accomplished through social oppression, primarily through the system known as Jim Crow.
  - The goal of this system was to maintain the southern ruling elite’s power by deflecting the frustration and anger of poor whites onto African Americans. Central to this strategy was an effort to segregate African Americans from as many aspects of everyday life as possible. In this way, poor whites could see themselves as superior to a large segment of the population, regardless of their own poverty.

- Initial efforts to impose segregation focused on barring African Americans from hotels, theaters, restaurants, and railroad cars. Eventually, with the acquiescence of a conservative Supreme Court, segregation was extended to public facilities, such as schools, hospitals, and parks. Even though defenders of the new order cited the “separate but equal” principle, the reality was that black schools, hospitals, parks, and other public facilities were woefully unequal in terms of funding and quality of services.
- Finally, the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment—which prohibited the denial of the right to vote on the basis of race—was undermined through a system of political oppression that included the adoption of the poll tax, literacy tests, and the *grandfather clause*.
  - The latter policy guaranteed the vote to anyone—even if he could not pass a literacy test—whose grandfather had been eligible to vote before 1867. Because no African Americans could vote before 1867, they remained ineligible.
  - By the end of the 1890s, most southern states had adopted each of these disenfranchisement mechanisms, and they enforced the laws with ruthless violence. The cumulative effect reduced overall black voting in the South by 62 percent. In some states, black voting was essentially eliminated.

### **Epidemic of Lynching**

- The key to the imposition of white supremacy by impoverishment, segregation, and disenfranchisement was a campaign of violence against African Americans. Beginning in the mid-1870s, armed vigilante groups across the South launched an unprecedented wave of beatings, humiliations, and murders. These groups largely consisted of poor whites and often were aided by local law officers.
- Between 1882 and 1910, at least 2,500 blacks were lynched. During the 1890s, lynchings soared to about 187 a year, or roughly one killing every two days. Southerners realized that lynchings were brutal and illegal acts that might arouse opposition in the North and

internationally. Thus, they claimed that nearly all lynchings were in response to sexual assaults by black men against white women.

- But then a fearless African American woman, Ida B. Wells, subjected lynching to closer scrutiny. After an incident in which three of her friends were lynched, Wells launched an investigation into lynching and published her findings in a pamphlet entitled “Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases.” The real purpose of lynching, Wells concluded, was to keep black Americans powerless and subservient; it had nothing to do with criminality or southern honor.



**Ida B. Wells, who documented lynching in the South, was also co-owner and editor of an anti-segregationist newspaper called *Free Speech*.**

- Wells and other activists campaigned for a federal anti-lynching law, an effort that drew support from some members of Congress. President Theodore Roosevelt devoted a portion of his annual address to Congress to denounce lynching as both illegal and un-American. But the anti-lynching legislation stood almost no chance of passage given the strength of southern opposition to it.
- Nonetheless, the crusade drew attention to the plight of African Americans and played an important role in bringing together activists to found the nation’s first civil rights organization, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

## The NAACP

- One key figure behind the founding of the NAACP was W. E. B. Du Bois. Born in Massachusetts, Du Bois attended Fisk University and Harvard, where he became the first African American to earn a Ph.D. Du Bois embraced a militant form of civil rights activism, believing that African Americans needed to organize to wage a relentless campaign against Jim Crow and other forms of racial oppression. In this outlook, he was in opposition to the most prominent black leader in America, Booker T. Washington.
  - Washington had been born a slave and had worked his way from virtually nothing to entry into Hampton Institute, a prominent black college. In 1881, he became the first president of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.
  - Although Washington bitterly resented racism, he believed opposing it to be unwise. Confronting racism, Washington argued, would make matters worse for African Americans. The best policy to pursue was accommodation and education, which would allow blacks to quietly elevate themselves and, ultimately, gain equal rights.
- Washington's accommodating approach to Jim Crow angered a number of younger African Americans, including Du Bois and Ida Wells. Thirty activists met at Niagara Falls in 1905 to devise a strategy for challenging Washington and the tremendous influence he exerted over black America. Out of this meeting came a new organization, the Niagara Movement.
- The Niagara Movement led a few successful fights for black rights, but it suffered from a lack of funds. Then, a brutal race riot in Springfield, Illinois, garnered national attention and drew sympathetic white Progressives to the movement. They convened a national conference on race relations in early 1909 that subsequently led to the founding of the NAACP.
- As the first national civil rights organization, the NAACP was active from the start. For example, in 1913, the organization

launched a protest against President Woodrow Wilson's firing of black employees and the imposition of sweeping segregation rules by federal agencies. The NAACP also took on Jim Crow in federal courts. In 1915, it played a central role in getting the Supreme Court to strike down the grandfather clause depriving southern blacks of the right to vote.

- In the years that followed, the NAACP built its membership, increased its financial base, and continued to fight for equal rights.

### **The Great Migration**

- The late-19<sup>th</sup>-century migration of millions of African Americans from the South to the North became known as the Great Migration. Comparing southern blacks to European immigrants, we can see typical push and pull factors at work in this migration.
- Not surprisingly, the push factors were the poverty and oppression associated with Jim Crow, and the primary pull factors were jobs and greater freedom. The North was no paradise, but it offered enormous opportunities compared to the rural South. Black migrants might be relegated to slum housing, menial labor, and low pay, but in many ways, they were far more prosperous and freer than they had been in the South.
- We should view these migrants as an anonymous but essential part of the civil rights movement. Their arrival in the North—mainly in cities—created centers of black life, commerce, and culture, out of which emerged some of the key civil rights leaders of the 1950s and 1960s.
- The large number of blacks arriving in the North elevated the question of racial equality there, as well. Many important early civil rights cases and initiatives from the 1930s to 1950s were centered in the North.

## Summing Up Early Civil Rights Activism

- In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, many Progressives pushed for greater equality, democracy, and justice for immigrants, workers, women—and for African Americans. A coalition of white and black Progressives produced the NAACP. But overall, mainstream Progressives tended to ignore the plight of black citizens. Moreover, many national Progressive organizations accepted the demands of southern members to segregate white and black chapters.
- What accounts for this somewhat spotty record? The simplest answer is that racism was so deeply entrenched in the American psyche during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that many Progressives had a hard time seeing blacks as their equals. Although some Progressives believed in racial equality, they chose not to push for it because they didn't think it was a battle that could be won.
- As a consequence, it was left largely to African American Progressives, such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Ida Wells, to keep alive the struggle for civil rights—a struggle that eventually gained traction during the 1950s and 1960s.

## Suggested Reading

Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*.

Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois*.

Norrell, *Up from History*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What was Jim Crow, and how was it imposed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century?
2. What were the principle differences in philosophy and action between civil rights leaders Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois?
3. How did such organizations as the NAACP fight for civil rights in the Progressive Era?

# Over There: A World Safe for Democracy

## Lecture 23

When World War I broke out during the summer of 1914, the vast majority of Americans expected the United States to remain neutral. One year later—even as Americans read news about the war's staggering death toll and destruction—they remained firm in their commitment to neutrality. Indeed, one of the most popular songs of 1915 was "I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier." But just two years later, the most popular song was "Over There," a rousing, patriotic ditty extolling America's commitment to helping the Allies win the war. This lecture is, in part, a tale of those two songs, which reveal a transformation of popular and political culture late in the Progressive Era.

### Outbreak of World War I

- The late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries witnessed rising tensions among rival European powers. These tensions were driven by colonial ambitions, disputed boundaries, economic competition, ethnic grievances, increased nationalism, and the egos of key European leaders. In response, the European powers built up their militaries and formed alliances.
- Many historians believe that a massive military conflict was inevitable, even if a Serbian nationalist had not assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand—heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne—in June 1914. Nonetheless, that was the incident that set in motion a series of furious diplomatic threats, accusations, and ultimatums among the European powers. In late July 1914, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia.
- Given the complex web of European alliances, this single declaration prompted all the other major European powers to join the conflict. On the side of the Central Powers were Austria-Hungary, Germany, and the Ottoman Empire. Opposing them



were the Allies, consisting of many nations but, most significantly, Russia, France, Italy, and Great Britain.

- Fighting got off to a slow start, and armies on both the Eastern and Western fronts soon became bogged down in trench warfare. It was clear that this would be an extraordinarily bloody conflict. For one thing, it was massive, covering much of Europe. And it involved the largest armies ever assembled. In the end, the lives of 10 million soldiers were claimed.

### **Isolationism versus Preparedness**

- As soon as the war began, President Woodrow Wilson made clear that the United States would not commit its forces to the conflict. Overall, Americans supported this position, which was consistent with the country's longstanding tradition of avoiding involvement in European affairs. Certain subgroups of Americans, including pacifists, socialists, Marxists, and others, opposed U.S. involvement in World War I for more particular reasons.
- Although most Americans initially supported Wilson's neutrality policy, a significant segment of the population favored a policy of "preparedness." Their chief spokesman was Theodore Roosevelt, who demanded that the Wilson administration impose a universal draft on military-age men and begin training them. Despite the efforts of Roosevelt and other prominent political figures, both Wilson and Congress remained unmoved.
- But then, events began to shift public opinion toward the preparedness viewpoint.
  - On May 7, 1915, German U-boats sank the British ocean liner *Lusitania* off the coast of Ireland, killing nearly 1,200 people, including 128 Americans. Anti-German sentiment was inflamed in the United States, strengthening the preparedness movement. Some, including Roosevelt, said that the United States should declare war on Germany.

- Ten months later, the Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa invaded U.S. territory and burned the town of Columbus, New Mexico, killing 18 citizens.
- In 1916, Congress passed—and Wilson signed—the National Defense Act, which authorized measures aimed at increasing military preparedness. But 1916 was an election year, and Wilson knew that most Americans still opposed U.S. entry into the war. Wilson also remained personally committed to neutrality, believing that if the United States stood outside the conflict, it would be in a position to act as an unbiased arbiter during the peace negotiations that followed.
- The situation continued to evolve rapidly after Wilson won reelection. In late January 1917, Germany announced that it would commence unrestricted submarine warfare, sinking any ship—including those of neutral nations—that was believed to be aiding the Allies. The subsequent sinking of U.S. ships in February outraged the public and pushed many to support military intervention.
- Then, on March 1, Americans learned of a telegram sent to Mexico by German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmermann, offering the Mexican government a piece of U.S. territory if its southern neighbor joined the war on Germany's side.
- Two weeks later, Czar Nicholas II, facing a growing popular revolt, abdicated his throne. Russia—a key member of the Allies—seemed about to fall apart. If that happened, Germany could turn its full force against Great Britain and France.
- Fearing a complete victory by the Central Powers, growing numbers of Americans called for the United States to enter the war on the Allies' behalf, and by now, Wilson agreed. American business was so tied to the Allied cause—through sales of goods and loans—that Wilson feared cataclysmic economic results if the Central Powers won. He also had come to believe that he would

have no role in the postwar peace process unless the United States contributed to the victory.

- Wilson went to Congress in early April 1917 to request a declaration of war against Germany. In his speech, he said that the United States needed to ensure an Allied victory to make the world “safe for democracy.” Given that a majority of Americans now supported this interventionist posture, Congress complied.

## **Mobilization**

- At the outset of American involvement, concerns over the ability of private enterprise to meet the needs of the American military prompted the Wilson administration to take over key parts of the economy.
  - In 1917, the federal government created the Railroad Administration to manage the nation’s rail system. The Wilson administration also established a Shipping Board to oversee a massive shipbuilding program and a War Industries Board to oversee manufacturing. The National War Labor Board required the beneficiaries of government contracts to accept the eight-hour day, a 40-hour workweek, and safer workplace standards at their businesses.
  - The aim of these policies was to balance the healthy profits of business against improved worker benefits, thereby ensuring a high rate of wartime production. And the measures succeeded. Millions of American workers enjoyed higher wages, better working conditions, and the representation of labor unions.
- Overall, the war was very good for the U.S. economy. During the first three years of the European conflict, the United States remained neutral militarily but decidedly pro-Ally when it came to economic matters. Exports boomed as the Allies spent billions of dollars on American-made arms, clothing, machinery, and food. Allies also borrowed money from U.S. banks.

- Meanwhile, the Wilson administration feared that antiwar sentiment could still undermine the mobilization effort. To prevent the erosion of public support, the administration created the Committee on Public Information, which drew on the advertising industry to create a massive pro-war campaign.
- Closely related to the publicity campaign was a parallel government initiative to suppress dissent. In June 1917, Wilson signed the Espionage Act, which restricted freedom of speech during times of war and made it a crime to write or say anything that might interfere with the U.S. war effort—or that might aid the enemy. One year later, Congress passed the Sedition Act, greatly broadening the definition of disloyal speech and behavior.
- Also part the wartime mobilization effort were Wilson's lofty expressions of internationalist idealism. It was his firm belief, Wilson told Americans and Europe, that as terrible as this war was, it could lead to an era of lasting peace. To ensure this would be the case, Wilson issued his famous Fourteen Points, outlining a new international order of cooperation.

### **The United States at War**

- The United States played a small but decisive role in the Allied victory. Americans sent vast amounts of goods and arms to the Allied cause, as well as several million soldiers. The American Expeditionary Force—commanded by General John J. Pershing—landed in France in May 1918.
- One of the first contributions U.S. forces made was to reinforce French lines against a massive offensive that had seen Germany get within 50 miles of Paris during the spring of 1918. U.S. forces bolstered Allied positions and joined in the counteroffensive to push the Germans back. In early June, a large contingent of American Marines played a key role in stopping and turning back German units that had penetrated the French lines.



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The War Department used all manner of persuasion to compel American men to enlist in the armed forces.

- Over the next few weeks, the Americans joined French and British forces to further stymie the German offensive. On July 18, 1918, Pershing and the American Expeditionary Force played a major role in the Allied victory in the Battle of Château-Thierry, effectively ending the German advance.
- Then, American troops commenced a long counteroffensive. In late September, Pershing attacked German lines in an offensive that pushed through France's Argonne Forest and drove the Germans into retreat. At last, the German military was exhausted and demoralized. Germany's position was further weakened by the surrender of some of its allies.
- On November 11, 1918—just seven months after the first wave of Americans had arrived in Europe—Germany agreed to an armistice. The “Great War” was over. In all, some 17 million civilians and military personnel were killed in World War I. The United States lost 117,000.

### **The Aftermath of War**

- Wilson had initially hoped to keep the United States out of the war so that it could serve as a neutral power in overseeing the effort to establish international peace. After that effort failed, he still held out hopes that the nation could use its influence on the victorious powers to craft a “peace without victory”—that is, a peace that was not punitive or vindictive.
- By the time the war ended, Wilson enjoyed tremendous popularity in the United States and much of Europe. Now, he hoped to use that popular support to influence the proceedings at the peace conference that began in Paris on January 18, 1919.
- However, the other members of the Big Four—Great Britain, France, and Italy—had experienced extraordinary suffering during the war and wanted to punish Germany and its allies. The final Treaty of Versailles reflected this goal. It called for Germany to be

disarmed, to lose all its colonies and the territory known as Alsace-Lorraine, and to pay massive reparations.

- Although Wilson opposed many of these measures, he relented in the hopes that the establishment of a League of Nations might still allow for a lasting peace. He soon discovered, however, that opposition was rising within the United States, both to the treaty and to U.S. membership in a League of Nations. In the end, Congress rejected both, and the United States reverted to another period of prolonged isolationism.

### Suggested Reading

Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World*.

Crocker, *The Yanks Are Coming!*

Kennedy, *Over Here*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Why was the United States originally committed to neutrality at the outset of World War I?
2. How did the U.S. economy benefit from World War I?
3. What impact did the entry of the United States on the side of the Allies have on the outcome of World War I?

# Upheaval and the End of an Era

## Lecture 24

**O**n November 11, 1918, America rejoiced. All across the country, town centers and city squares filled with people cheering in celebration. The Great War was over, and most Americans assumed that the news of the war's end would mean a return to peace and prosperity. But in many ways, history is the study of surprises. Although Americans didn't know it, the country was on the verge of several years of turmoil. Indeed, 1919 would turn out to be one of a handful of years in American history—along with 1776, 1861, 1886, 1946, and 1968—marked by upheaval.

### Postwar Labor Unrest

- World War I had been very good for the American economy. The United States remained militarily neutral for the first three years of the conflict, but economically, it provided massive quantities of goods and food to the Allies via international trade. The result was a booming industrial economy. Unemployment practically disappeared, and real wages rose 7 percent during the war.
- There were relatively few strikes during the war years. In the name of the war effort, the federal government had pressured business and industry to adopt the eight-hour workday, boost wages, and officially recognize unions. These policies helped keep the peace between labor and capital.
- Workers believed that such policies would be maintained after the war ended. Their thinking on this matter was shaped by the core ideals of the Progressive Era, namely, that the government should take a more hands-on approach to managing the national economy because doing so would benefit all Americans. But business leaders sought a return to laissez-faire government and an emphasis on individualism.



- Accordingly, as soon as the war ended, business owners began to rescind wartime concessions on shorter hours, higher wages, and union recognition. These actions caused widespread anger among American workers. As a result, 1919 was rocked by the greatest wave of strikes in American history to that point. Some 4 million workers walked off the job in 3,600 strikes.
- Amidst these thousands of work stoppages, three major strikes garnered the most attention: the Seattle General Strike in February 1919, the strike of patrolmen in the Boston police department in September 1919, and the great steel strike, also in September 1919. The latter was massive, involving 365,000 workers in 13 states and cutting U.S. steel production by 50 percent.

## Red Scare

- Another factor adding to the fear of industrial unrest in America was the Russian Revolution, which had begun in early 1917.
  - By October of that year, Lenin and the Bolsheviks had seized power. Communism and socialism were no longer abstract political philosophies but the founding principles of a major nation's government.
  - Then, in March 1919, Americans learned that the Soviet Union had established the Communist International (Comintern), an organization dedicated to spreading communism worldwide. Communist-led governments were soon established in parts of Germany and Hungary.
- The year 1919 also witnessed 25 major anti-black riots across America. The worst in the North took place in Chicago in July 1919 and left 38 dead. Even though whites instigated every one of these riots, some officials and newspaper editors attributed the violence to radicals stirring up African Americans. The New York Times, for example, ran the headline "Reds Try to Stir Negroes to Revolt."
- In late April 1919, a group of anarchists mailed some 30 package bombs to prominent politicians and business leaders, including

John D. Rockefeller and A. Mitchell Palmer, the U.S. attorney general. Many of the bombs were intercepted and others failed to explode, but the episode stoked fears among the public that sinister forces of radicalism were at work in America.

- Then came another wave of package bombs in June 1919 and the resultant deaths of two people. All the bombs included the same note, which read, “We will destroy to rid the world of your tyrannical institutions.”
- In response, Palmer established the General Intelligence Division within the Department of Justice and placed a young man named J. Edgar Hoover in charge of it.
- Hoover’s staff compiled a list of suspected “Reds” and launched what became known as the Palmer Raids. These two massive operations, one in November 1919 and the second in January 1920, led to 6,000 arrests.
- Many state governments also got caught up in the hysteria. Between 1919 and 1920, for example, 25 states passed laws banning the display of a red flag, the symbol of radicalism. Another 30 states passed peacetime sedition laws, outlawing membership in radical organizations perceived as dedicated to stopping industry or destroying the government.

### **Legacy of Postwar Strife**

- Most historians agree that the post–World War I tumult and Red Scare marked the end of the Progressive Era and ushered in a decade dominated by conservatism. Specifically, it marked a renewed commitment among business and political leaders to laissez-faire government and individualism. This political culture manifested itself in a number of ways.
- One of the first results of this culture was a conservative economic policy. If the Progressive Era had seen state and federal government take on new responsibilities of regulating the economy, the 1920s witnessed a return to a more hands-off economic policy. The

Republican administration of Calvin Coolidge pursued such pro-business policies as low corporate taxes, minimal regulation, and virtually no antitrust initiatives. American business leaders took the cue and continued the postwar campaign against labor unions.

- Another legacy of the upheaval of 1919–1920 was a strengthening of America's longstanding fear of radicalism, symbolized in the famous Sacco and Vanzetti case.
  - Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco were Italian immigrants and avowed anarchists who were arrested in 1920 for the murder of two payroll officers at a Massachusetts shoe factory.



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**Adding energy to the immigration restriction movement was a reborn Ku Klux Klan; by the mid-1920s, the new version of this organization had a membership of 5 million.**

Scholars still debate whether they were innocent or guilty, but nearly everyone agrees that Sacco and Vanzetti's trial was a sham. The two were found guilty, sentenced to death, and ultimately, executed.

- America's anti-radical tradition would endure for the rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, limiting the influence and strength of the American labor movement and shaping American attitudes during the Cold War.
- During the postwar turmoil and Red Scare, Americans attributed much of the unrest to the influence of foreigners. Not surprisingly, this connection between radicalism and immigration lent energy to a movement calling for immigration restriction. Congress eventually responded with the National Origins Act of 1924, limiting the number of immigrants allowed into the United States.
- Closely related to the movement for immigration restriction was the movement to ban alcohol. Indeed, support for prohibition had been building for decades, primarily in small-town America and the Bible Belt.
  - Prohibitionists viewed the American city as a modern-day Sodom and Gomorrah, filled with immigrants; animated by new ideas, such as voting rights for women; and awash in alcohol. Prohibition, then, was both a moral crusade and an anti-immigrant, anti-urban, anti-modern crusade.
  - Before the war, prohibition efforts had largely failed. But after the war, support surged. The Eighteenth Amendment, barring "the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors," was actually passed by Congress and sent to the states during the war, but two-thirds of the states that ratified it did so during the tumultuous year of 1919. It took effect in 1920 and lasted for 13 very dry years.
- In the wake of the Great War and the unrest of 1919–1920, the American people returned to the isolationist philosophy they had

held from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century up to the 1890s. Polls showed that by the late 1920s, most Americans had come to believe that American entry into World War I had been a mistake. Isolationist sentiment only intensified in the late 1930s, when Congress passed three Neutrality Acts to prevent U.S. entry into World War II.

### **Summing Up the Gilded Age and Progressive Era**

- In the Gilded Age—the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century—the United States grew into both an industrial power and a world power. The nation's farms and factories produced unprecedented amounts of goods, and in the aggregate, national wealth grew significantly. This period also saw extraordinary technological innovation, which transformed nearly every aspect of American life.
- But all the glittering aspects of the Gilded Age were accompanied by tremendous social problems. Exploitation of workers led to thousands of strikes. Soaring poverty raised troubling questions about the threat inequality posed to republican institutions. The emergence of huge corporations and the tremendous political influence they enjoyed likewise raised questions about the future of American democracy. Yet when activists and others called for reform, they bumped up against an establishment that was committed to the traditional American values of minimal government and individualism.
- In the years that followed 1900, reformers finally gained the upper hand. The Progressives were committed to another set of traditional American values that called for activist government and celebrated the common good.
  - Their argument was simple: Poverty, inequality, political corruption, and unchecked corporate power threatened to destroy American democracy and prosperity. A judicious use of state power to, for example, limit the power of corporations or improve public health could restore some balance and improve the lives of the great majority of Americans.

- Thus, the Progressive Era witnessed the adoption of many wide-ranging reforms affecting the economy, the workplace, and the political process, as well as cities and endangered parts of the environment.
- Nonetheless, American history is marked by many political turns, especially when it comes to periods of substantial change and reform. In many ways, these moments represent an ongoing struggle between competing American ideals.
  - For a time, the ideals of interventionist government and the common good prevail. Then, the pendulum seems to swing back toward the ideals of laissez-faire and individualism. We've seen this shift many times in American history.
  - The Gilded Age was followed by the Progressive Era, which was followed by the conservative Roaring Twenties, which was followed by the reform era known as the New Deal, which was followed by a period of conservatism in the 1950s, which was followed by the period of reformist activism in the Great Society of the 1960s.
  - The Gilded Age and Progressive Era encapsulate this ongoing American tradition of competing social, political, and economic values.
- The importance of studying history has been explained in this way: "History isn't really in the past. History is what we are made of." In other words, much of the society that we live in—its values, institutions, social relations, power structures, and more—is the product of our history. If this is true, then our early-21<sup>st</sup>-century America is, in some important ways, made from the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era.

## Suggested Reading

Ackerman, *Young J. Edgar*.

Gage, *The Day Wall Street Exploded*.

Russell, *A City in Terror*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What was the cause of the great strike wave of 1919?
2. What was the Red Scare of 1919–1920, and what impact did it have on American history?
3. Why are the Gilded Age and Progressive Era significant periods in U.S. history?

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